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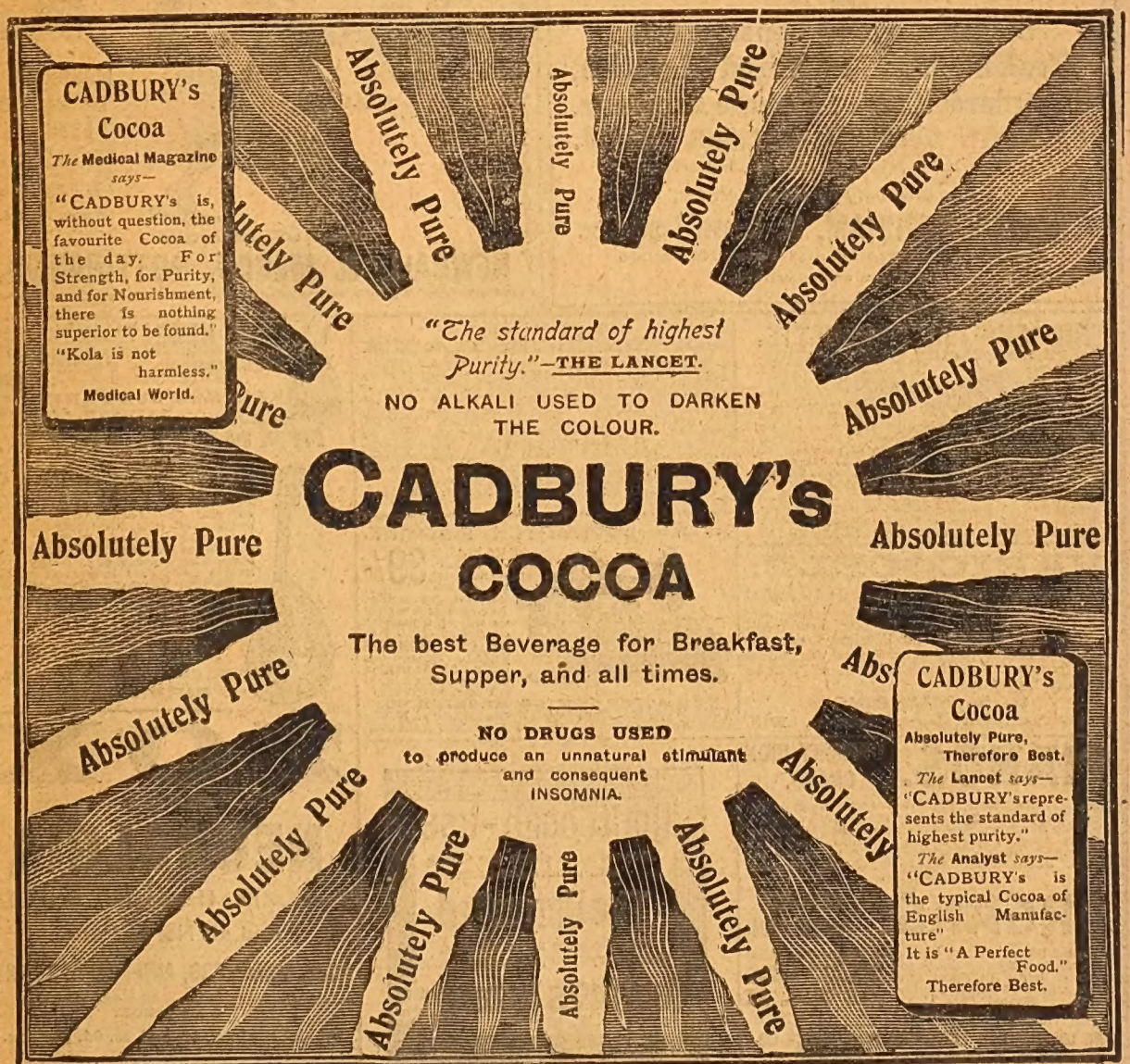
EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 519. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 10TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.



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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 519. ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending December 10, 1898.

Two Saints and a Tea-Set.

A Legend of Cornwall.

MORE than thirteen hundred years ago, "when saints were many and sinners few," the county of Cornwall was better supplied in the former commodity than any other county ever was before or since.

From St. Paternus (or Petherwin as the parish is now called) in the east to St. Sennen in the west, the whole country side teemed with holy men and women. It has been whispered that some of them were not saints at all, that they owe their present saintship to the fact that a church has been erected in the neighbourhood of their dwelling-place; and, as they were people of some note, the said church and adjoining parish have been named after them, with the title of Saint to heighten the effect.

Such base calumnies as these are best treated with the contempt they deserve.

These good people were all saints of the first water, and if their conduct was not always as virtuous as might be, we must remember it was expedient in those days to sometimes stray a little from the path of grace.

In the west of Cornwall dwelt the two saints of whom the legend treats—St. Just and St. Keverne. Their homes were about thirty miles apart as the crow flies, for St. Just lived on the north coast, a few miles west of St. Ives and close to the headland of Cape Cornwall, while St. Keverne had his

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habitation on the south coast, overlooking the terrible Manacle Rocks of which more anon.

Both gentlemen were in very comfortable circumstances, as their parishioners were well-to-do and treated their spiritual advisers liberally. They had to, or woe betided them. St. Keverne was a director of the Cornubia Phoenicia and Roman Serpentine works (now in the hands of a Receiver) he received good tithes from the farmers in the neighbourhood, for it is a rich pasture country; and the Manacles were a continual source of profit.

Many a stately trireme and proud galley went to pieces on those treacherous rocks, and though the crews were never saved, yet a good deal of the cargoes was brought ashore, and of course St. Keverne expected to be presented with a very fair share. It is said that a fisherman of Pictish origin who had settled in those parts objected strongly to the Saint having so large a proportion of the salvage, and held a meeting to protest against what "in his opeenion was a maist awfu' extortion."

But when St. Keverne heard of this he promptly excommunicated the malcontent, cast spells over all his belongings and generally made his life a misery to him, and threatened to build a lighthouse on Manacle Point if he heard any more grumbling.

These vigorous measures had the desired effect. The parishioners kicked the Pict into Porthoustock Cove, and presented the Saint with a serpentine pulpit for his church as a mark of their reverence and esteem.

St. Just's was a mining district and there were some very rich setts in the neighbourhood; such as Botallack, Levant, Huel Owles and Huel Cock and lots of others. St. Just held shares in nearly all of them and in addition he received dues from the adventurers to pray for success to the bal. The pilchard fishery was good too in the summer, and the Saint had to be propitiated to attract the fish and drive away porpoises. So that, taking all in all, St. Just was quite as well off as St. Keverne.

One day St. Just had an idea that he ought to stroll across and hunt up St. Keverne. He hadn't seen anything of him for a long time, and the thirty miles or so would be a nice little walk; and if he had an early lunch and started directly after he would get there in time for tea.

Then he could stroll back in the cool of the evening. Saints moved more quickly in those days than they do now; there was more competition. So he donned his best seven leagued boots and after a very pleasant walk reached St. Keverne's house.

St Keverne was superintending the whitewashing of his garden wall and inciting his myrmidons to work a little more quickly, in language more forcible that polite.

But he brightened up when he saw his visitor.

"Aw, my tender dear, is that you sure enough? You'm quite a stranger, but I'm main glad to see 'ee. Are 'ee feeling pretty tolerable now, my son?"

"Iss, I'm brave, but fair chacken for a dish o' tay. Have 'ee had your tay yet?"

"No, I'm going in to have it directly most. Come inside, my son, you'm kindly welcome. Jenifer," he called to the servant, "bring in tay as soon as you can," here he dropped his voice to a stage whisper, "and put out the new tay set. Would 'ee like to wash your hands before you sit down, my son," he asked St. Just, who replied in the affirmative, and was conducted to the best bedroom to "clane" himself.

* * * * *

Now it so happened that a galley from the sunny south had, a few weeks previously, come sailing up the Channel, bound for Looe, intending to take back a cargo of copper brought down from Caradon Hill.

One of St. Keverne's parishioners caught sight of it coming up from the West just at dusk, and, of course, he rushed back to the village with the joyful news. The simple-minded fisherman thought that nothing less than a display of lanterns would suffice to celebrate the occasion, and to add more picturesqueness to the fête, fastened the lanterns on donkeys' backs and paraded the beach with them.

What happened on board the galley never transpired, but it was generally supposed the captain mistook his bearings and thinking he was off Falmouth Harbour steered, as he fondly imagined, straight into it.

After the Manacles had done their work satisfactorily, coracles began to put out in large numbers for the ostensible purpose of rescuing the crew of the galley. They did not succeed in a single instance in that laudable desire, but managed to save most of the cargo, after tremendous efforts, judging from the terrific row which went on all night.

Next day a deputation waited on St. Keverne asking him to pray for the souls of the departed sailors, and bringing him a small present saved from the ship. This was a tea-set of the most beautiful china, exquisitely painted and mounted with superbly chased silver. It had been intended as a present to the King of Looe, but how was St. Keverne to know that? So he accepted the offering graciously, thanked the deputation, gave them his blessing and dimissed them.

Up to now he had had no opportunity of showing off his prize, so he rather hailed the advent of St. Just with delight. For saints are very like ordinary folk in that respect; if they have anything new they can't rest till they have flaunted it before the eyes of an admiring friend.

St. Just came in to tea with a glowing face, the result of his ablutions. He glowed a trifle more when he saw the meal provided for his refreshment. They still have teas like that in Cornwall, thank goodness: in out of the way places where fashion has not yet set her ruthless foot.

None of your wafer-like bread and butter and thin strips of tennis cake, which have to be balanced on the edge of a saucer, as there are no plates provided. No, this was a Homeric tea, if there be such a thing. Muggotty pie, cold beef-and-tatie pasty, junket and cream, gooseberry tart, a huge saffron cake and a figgy fuggen; and if you want to know what that is, go down to Cornwall and see. Well might St. Just lick his lips as he gazed on the spread.

"Cluck 'ee down there, my son," said St. Keverne, politely handing St. Just a chair, after saying grace, and St. Just "clucked" accordingly; and started to take in ballast for his homeward journey. In fact he devoted so much attention to his inner man that St. Keverne feared his new tea-set would escape notice altogether.

So after rattling his spoon against a saucer and trying other devices to attract his guest's attention to his china, he plumped the question straight out.

"What do'ee think of this bit of cloam, my son?"

St. Just gazed at the said bit of cloam, struggled manfully with a mouthful of pasty, overcame it, and ejaculated: "Clane-off," and once more loaded himself up with pasty.

"Iss, 'tes so sure enough," replied his host, rather dis-

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appointed that his guest did not show more enthusiasm about it, and gave a long description of the wreck and subsequent rescue, while St. Just munched away and nodded acquiescence.

But though St. Just did not seem to take much interest in the "cloam," he was in reality breaking the Tenth Commandment as hard as he could go.

He had spotted the set directly he sat down at the table, and had been debating in his mind ever since as to how he could manage to get hold of it, by fair means or foul. For he saw that the possession of such a neat bit of china would add greatly to his social position with the *élite* of north Cornwall.

But he knew that St. Keverne would want a very long price for it, even if he would part with it at all, which wasn't likely. So, St. Just inwardly determined to bide his time and see what turned up; and in order not to appear too much interested in the "cloam" he turned the conversation to religious topics, deploring the ritualistic practices of St. Kenwyn, up Truro way, which were creating much commotion in the county.

However, fortune generally comes to him who knows how to wait. Their saintships had finished tea and were having a spirited argument as to the respective merits of bags and plates for collection purposes; St. Just holding that plates were opposed to the principle of not letting your left hand see what your right hand was doing, and also that people would let a plate pass when they would put a penny in a bag. St. Keverne held the opposite view and argued that a person would put sixpence in a plate for appearance sake, while he would put a button into a bag. They were arguing as only Saints can argue when the door opened and Jenifer appeared.

"Please, feyther, Mrs. Chegwidden wants 'ee to come and see her to once."

"Aw, drat the woman," said St. Keverne, rising from his chair. "Why couldn't she wait till morning? Well, I reckon I must go. Will'ee 'scuse me for a bit, brother Just, while I run down and see her?"

"Certainly," replied St. Just. "I'll wait till'ee come back." So away went St. Keverne to see his troublesome parishioner, leaving St. Just alone in the room with the coveted "cloam."

No sooner had St. Keverne's footsteps died away in the distance than St. Just transferred all the tea-set into his somewhat capacious pockets and walked out of the room.

"Jenifer, my dear," he called. "I'm going to walk round the garden a bit till your master returns," and he stepped out into the garden, down the path to the road, and, making sure that no one was watching, made tracks for his home in Penwith as hard as he could go.

St. Keverne's parishioner did not keep him as long as he expected and he was back in twenty minutes. "Where's St. Just to?" he called to Jenifer, who replied that his Reverence was in the garden. But a short search showed that his Reverence was *not* in the garden, and St. Keverne, much perplexed, came back into his dining room. There his eye caught the vacant space on the tea-tray, and a closer examination showed him that his beloved "cloam" was gone.

He was sufficiently acquainted with his brother saints to guess at once what had happened, so with the single ejaculation: "Aw!" he rushed out and started in pursuit of his late guest.

As he crossed Crowza Down it struck him he had no weapon either of offence or defence, so in case St. Just should show fight, he picked up some rocks of ironstone and put them in his pocket. As these rocks weighed several hundred pounds apiece they impeded his progress rather; but he got over the ground pretty quickly.

St. Breaga, who was watering her front garden and saw him go past, said afterwards that he was "Coos'n down the road like as if he were pisky led."

At last as he turned a bend in the road he caught sight of his quarry some little way on ahead. St. Just was afraid to travel too quickly for fear of breaking the teacups, and he also thought he was quite safe by now, so he was marching calmly along, humming the Furry Song, when he was suddenly brought up standing, by hearing someone shouting behind him.

He turned round to see St. Keverne flying after him, very much out of breath but evidently meaning business.

"Here, Just, you gashly thief, what have 'ee done with my cloam?" gasped the outraged Saint. St. Just thought that perhaps a soft answer might turn away wrath, so he tried the experiment.

"Aw, my dear, why, what are 'ee talking about? You'm mazed, I reckon."

The soft answer did not have the desired effect. "I don't want none of your gammut, hand over that cloam or I'll knack 'ee stiff," roared the now thoroughly roused Saint.

"Come over and fetch your dratted cloam," replied St. Just, putting himself in a wrestling attitude, the effect of which was somewhat marred by the bulging outlines of the tea-set in his pockets.

St. Keverne wasted no more words, but pulled out one of his rocks and hurled it at his opponent. It was a splendid shot and took effect just where the fourth button of St. Just's waistcoat would have been had he worn a waistcoat.

Even a Saint could not stand the effect of a heavy rock on top of cold pasty and figgy fuggen. St. Just doubled up in silent agony for a minute. Then, as his breath came slowly back to him, he dragged the source of all his trouble, the famous tea-set, out of his pockets, flung it down in the grass, and bolted off towards Marazion as fast as his damaged diaphragm would allow him. The battle was over, St. Keverne had conquered.

The victorious Saint took his success very calmly. He simply picked up his recaptured "cloam" and trotted home to the peaceful little village that still bears his name. But before leaving the battle-field he emptied his pockets of the rocks he had brought.

"And there they stand until this day to witness if I lie" and anyone who travels from Breage to Marazion may see them on the left hand side of the road.

And as a further proof of the truth of the legend, they are of an entirely different kind of stone to that of the neighbourhood they stand in; you must go to Crowza Down before you find any like it.

Although these rocks have been removed several times for agricultural purposes, yet the next morning always finds them back in their old place. And the name of this place is Tre-men-keverne.

Public opinion was so bitter against St. Just that he decided to leave home for a little while and went on a mission to the Saxons.

The chronicles do not state how many converts he made, but judging from the manners and customs of the modern Saxon, his mission seems to have been remarkably successful.

He returned home to end his days in peace, however, and died very much respected by all who knew him (St. Keverne excepted) in the year of grace 627.

R. H. Watson.

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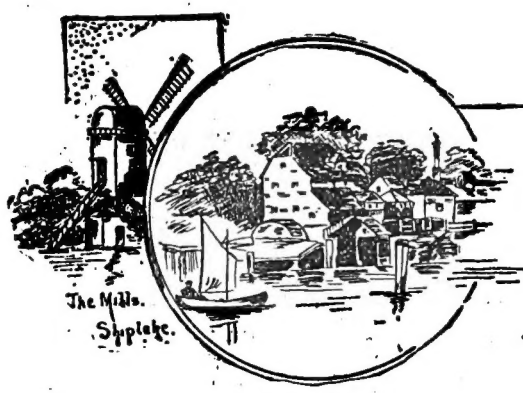

By Right of Conquest.

MISS TERRENCE, going down the road, watched the girl who was coming towards her.

There were three men with the girl, and only Lancaster was with Miss Terrence. However, as he was all the world to her, she was content. They met in front of Captain Lansing's quarters.

Lansing was a cynic who observed his kind and told the result of his observations. Such are deservedly unpopular, but command appreciative audiences that are the envy of the good-hearted. It was to an audience of the sort that he recounted the meeting, the same afternoon, when the band stopped playing and the invading hosts from the town had departed.

"Dorothy Terrence," he began, settling back to temporary repose, "Dorothy Terrence came up the road. She had Lancaster with her, and she was looking happy. Miss Leeds—the banker's daughter, you know—came down the road. She had Kent, and Dartmoor, and Fergusson with her, and she was looking like a celestial being.

"They were both dressed in white—but there was a difference. Mrs. Lansing says it lay in a silk foundation. Be that as it may, there was a wonderfully made hat, all drifts and mists, and sprays of white, on the head of Miss Leeds, and a fluffy-all-round sort of sunshade over that.

"Dorothy saw Miss Leeds from afar, but the latter did not see Dorothy. They came together in front of my quarters—'and I was there.' Dorothy moved to one side. It was her instant attitude, and I fear, prophetic. The woman who steps aside can always stay there. But all might have gone well, and this story might never have been told, if Kent had not indulged his vulgar propensity for introductions.

"Miss Leeds bestowed a sweet and transitory smile upon Miss Terrence; but Lancaster is not the best-looking fellow in the county for nothing. If any of you happen to share my good fortune of knowing her, you will understand what happened when she turned her eyes upon him with a trick she has of seeming to look into one's very soul. She has the most beautiful voice imaginable, and she brought that into play also. Dorothy stood it as long as she could, and then she tried to get him away. He never even heard her. If Miss Leeds had not gazed soul-searchingly at him, and told him that she must be going, but would see him at the ball, he doubtless would be standing there still, with Dorothy anxiously watching him. It will be worth going to the hop to see developments."

* * * * *

Lancaster stood at the door of the dressing-room and watched Miss Leeds, while he waited for Dorothy.

He watched her as the huddling feminine mass made way for her at the mirror and she stood unchallenged, leisurely touching her glimmering brown hair and pinning a great white rose upon her shoulder.

Dorothy waited at his side for fully five minutes before he saw her. Then she laughed mockingly up into his face, and wished that her laughter might have been a blow.

As soon as he could leave her he went running and sliding across the floor where Miss Leeds stood at bay before a besieging group. She was backed against the wall, and a decoration formed of swords was just above her head.

"There are only twenty dances," she kept repeating, "and I never divide."

Lancaster took two of his fellow-officers by the shoulders and put them out of his way. Miss Leeds looked into his eyes and smiled as, it seemed to him, no woman had ever smiled before. She put her card into his hand.

"The two with the crosses are the ones I promised you," she said. And as she had promised and he had asked nothing, his heart beat high with triumph.

Not that it was a case of love at first sight. He was in love with Dorothy. But the most faithful of men may pay the court she expects to a belle, and may allow himself to be flattered by her marked favour.

He could honestly, then, and for several weeks afterwards, give Dorothy the comfort she sorely needed, and say that he did not even think Miss Leeds beautiful. "She has style and charm," he passed judgment, "but not beauty. And she is a flirt." He meant that Miss Terrence should understand how entirely he abhorred that.

"Did she try to flirt when you called upon her?"

He had made a point of confessing the call directly it was made, and he thought it tactless of Dorothy to dwell upon it. He shrugged his shoulders. "She does that with every man."

It was a truth which he fully appreciated, but its feeble light no longer fell upon the path of duty when the time came that the sun of Miss Leeds's countenance shed its glow upon the highway of inclination. And yet she did her best to make it clear to him.

"Now, listen to something I mean to tell you," she said to him. She set down her tea-cup and leant towards him, with her elbows upon her knees and her chin

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between her soft, pink palms. Her eyes were looking straight into his, and they filled his heart with anticipation.

"Do you know that this is a risky game we are playing, and that we have been playing it for all it is worth this last fortnight or so?"

Lancaster knit his brows.

"It is not worth while to pretend you don't understand. We both know exactly what I mean. But I want to be sure we both know that it is only a game. I am not in earnest, and you must not be."

He gazed at her, speechless.

"I suppose you are thinking that the suggestion of serious intentions might come first from you," she said; "that may be your way of looking at it, but it is not mine. I don't care to let you have anything to reproach me with. I have had enough of that in the past. I am a hopeless flirt, you know. I go into the thing for the fun there is in it, and it is only fair to warn you."

She leant back in her chair and fell to watching the passers-by in the street and to biting at a piece of sugar, meditatively.

"If you will accept matters that way, we can have a very good time; if you don't, I have warned you; and the consequences—if there are any—must be on your own head."

Lancaster laughed rather weakly. "I accept the terms," he said. "It is understood that this is only a flirtation."

Which he explained to Dorothy at much length, but which she would not understand, and was so unreasonable about it as to break her engagement. Lancaster was deeply aggrieved and rather more deeply relieved. But it made one fact plain to him; that he was seriously in love with a girl who frankly told him that he was no more to her than a score had been before, than scores might be thereafter. And it was all in vain that he tried to change her.

"I warned you quite fairly," she reminded him. "I warned you," Miss Leeds repeated, "and nobody has suffered but yourself, unless"—she glanced at him with a quizzical little smile—"unless there was another girl?"

"There was another girl," he answered.

She shrugged her shoulders tolerantly. "That was to have been expected. Most problems of the heart are in the rule of three."

He frowned angrily and his lips curved in contempt. "Are you absolutely heartless? Have you no pity for her?"

"Not a great deal. If you were the sort to desert her in a fortnight for a girl who made not the slightest effort to win you, and who told you that she didn't love you, I think, upon the whole, that she is rather well rid of you."

Lancaster was biting his lips, and he was very angry. "She is a better woman than you," he said.

"That may be. But still," she laughed good-naturedly, "do you think I am bad enough for you to be passing judgment upon me?"

"I do; for you are doing the thing in a cold-blooded way, and I—I," he said despondently "have lost my head."

She smiled into his eyes. "You don't want to do that. It is such a handsome head. Lose your heart—it is not worth nearly so much."

He turned and faced her squarely. "I am likely to lose more than that," he burst out suddenly; "I am likely to lose my life."

"Oh! come," she said, "you are not contemplating falling on the point of your sword, or drowning yourself, or superinducing galloping consumption, are you? I have had men do a number of things for me, but never quite that."

"I am not contemplating doing any of those. I may be a good deal of a fool, but not enough of one to put an end to myself for a woman who cares nothing for me."

"Yet that has been done," she suggested.

"What I meant was, and what I intended to tell you when I asked you to come to-day, was that I am going to the Soudan. I have volunteered for service."

"When do you leave?" she asked coolly.

"The day after to-morrow. And now I am going to ask you to promise me something."

"If it is not something I cannot promise."

"Not that. I shall leave that until I come back—if I do come back. If I do not—in short, if I am killed"—she gave a little shudder; he saw that she did, and repeated—"if I am killed, I shall leave orders that my most treasured possession shall be sent to you."

"Do you mean your horse?"

"I mean the horse. It will make me as happy as it would seem I am meant to be, to know that if I die you will have her, and will ride her, and be kind to her. For you are fond of her, too."

Miss Leeds knitted her brows and considered. "And if I should not?" she said.

"She shall not go to any one else. I will have Dartmoor shoot her on the day that he hears my death confirmed."

Miss Leeds switched at the skirt of her habit. "Is there no one else who is fond of her also?"

"No," he answered.

"But that other girl you told me of?"

There flashed back upon Lancaster's memory how Dorothy had been wont to stand with her arms round the arched black neck, and her cheek against the warm, soft nose; how the mare had followed her tamely, as she would follow no other but himself. Then Miss Leeds turned the sun of her questioning eyes upon him. They were serious now, and their gentle light scattered the mists of memories. Dorothy only valued the horse for the master's sake, and the master is no longer anything to her.

"Will you do as I ask?"

A little ironical smile, the smile of an easy-going cynicism, curled her lips. "Unto the victor belong the spoils. Yes, if anything happens to you, I will take the horse. But you must not be rash. I believe I prefer your safety to it."

Three months afterwards, Miss Leeds, bending forward to stroke the glossy neck of the black mare that had belonged to Lieutenant Lancaster, turned and glanced up into the face of the man who was riding beside her.

"Who was that girl you bowed to near the gates—the one with the big sad eyes?"

"It was Dorothy Terrence," he told her. "Lancaster used once to be engaged to her."

"No wonder then she looked at me reproachfully."

She tried to laugh, but the laughter broke and she grew white as she set the mare into a gallop.

"There may, you know—" she called to him, mockingly, above the clatter of the hoofs—"there may lurk the adder of remorse among the victor's spoils."

G. Eaton.

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The Duel in the Salon.

AN INCIDENT IN THE CAREER OF A SOLDIER OF FRANCE.

A.M.

"*Peste!*" exclaimed de Crenan, making a gesture of impatience. "The gossips have had it their own way for twenty years, gentlemen; but if I must blab, I would rather two listeners like yourselves than a score like the cacklers of the Court or the idlers of the guardroom.

"Know then, *mes amis*, that 'twas dealt by a woman, and of all the wounds I bear is the only one which has had to go unavenged."

The blow doubtless had been aimed at the Chevalier's life, since it was between the neck and the shoulder; but the weapon had been held in awkward hands, and while failing to inflict the fatal wound, had deprived the Chevalier of the use of his left arm.

"Yes, gentlemen, it came from the hand of a woman; and, *ma foi*! after twenty years, I will say a dainty hand too, though——"

The sentence was completed by an expressive shrug of the Chevalier's shoulders.

"But fill your glasses, friends, for in the telling I'll warrant the story will prove dryer than it was in the doing; when, *morbleu*! I sweated like a bull and bled like a pig.

"It was nigh upon three weeks after the beating we gave the Spaniards at Rocroi that I arrived in Paris from Italy. I had obtained leave from Turenne.

"The Cardinal delayed to sign the patent confirming the right conceded me by Chavigny, to cut wood in the great forest between Poligny and Dôle.

"One evening towards the end of July, I was passing through the west gallery of the Palais when someone plucked me by the sleeve. Turning, I saw La Porte, first valet to the King.

"He had withdrawn from his doublet a letter, tied about with scarlet thread and secured with a broad seal. Leaning towards me he whispered a few words in my ear.

"When I found myself in the street, it struck me that I had engaged too quickly in an enterprise wherein I was nowise concerned. My consent to become La Porte's messenger had involved me in a plot against the Cardinal.

"So, while the clocks of the Faubourg were yet striking nine, I was ringing at the great gate of the Hôtel de Chevreuse.

"The Duchess received me in her boudoir. Evidently she was expecting a communication. But while she dallied to break the seal, she bestowed on me a glance full of piercing inquiry, and directed her Chamberlain to take charge of me till such time as the answer would be ready.

"Food was set before me, and wine; but my appetite was nigh spoilt by finding myself an object for the curiosity of a posse of ill-looking fellows, who, under pretext of searching for a comrade, entered the apartment, and after staring at me much longer than was agreeable, departed muttering together.

"At the end of an hour Madame sent for me.

"'You will remain in the Hôtel, monsieur, till morning,' said she, addressing me with great suavity. 'The streets are not safe after dark,' and with an imperious gesture of the hand she dismissed me.

"Some weeks after my journey to the Rue Dominique I had returned from the Palais after one of my fruitless interviews with the chief lackey of the minister, and sitting over my supper at Cormier's, I decided that the camp would agree better with my health than the Court.

"Calling for another bottle I began turning over the situation in my mind.

"As I lingered over the flagon, the sound of rough jesting and loud laughter reached me across the room.

"Presently, I could distinguish a voice mildly protesting that he was only a poor cloth merchant from Flanders, who was playing simply for amusement till *monsieur le capitaine* challenged him; and, having lost, doubled the stake and asked for his revenge.

"'Believe me, gentlemen,' the man ran on, '*le capitaine* is mistaken. Firm play, a level head, and a fair knowledge of the game is all the magic I have used. I am just an honest dealer in cloth from the town of Douay in Flanders seeking to sell my wares to the merchants of your good city of Paris.

"'*Parbleu!*' continued the mild voice. 'It is not I you should blame, monsieur; it is Dame Fortune, who, being a woman, has turned her back on the old love to show her face to the new.

"'To-day, monsieur, the game has run for the wand, to-morrow it may run for the sabre.'

"I strode up to the edge of the crowd to get a look at the speaker.

"He caught me peering over the shoulder of a big Burgundian in cross belt and jackboots, who had just entered the tavern and was attracted to the table by the noise.

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"While I was still wondering what it might mean, I heard my name called. Turning about, I saw a man in dark livery holding in his hand a letter.

"The letter was superscribed 'To the Chevalier de Crenan at the hostelry Le Cormier near St. Eustache,' and was sealed with black wax.

"At the same instant there was a movement at the table. The cloth merchant had risen. 'De Crenan?' he was saying, 'The Chevalier de Crenan? Surely it must be the gallant gentleman who rode with me two years ago from Cambray to Rheims, when but for his protection I should have fallen into the hands of the *spadassins* who infest the road.'

"In another moment he had joined me.

"'What is the meaning of the farce?' I whispered.

"'In good time, Chevalier,' he rejoined, 'in good time,' adding in undertones, wi h a glance at the man in livery, 'Does he wait for an answer?'

"Withdrawing to a corner I broke the seal.

"'If monsieur the Chevalier de Crenan' ran the missive 'desires to employ his sword in honourable service—to succour France and win distinction, he will follow the messenger who brings this letter.'

"I raised my eyes. The man was watching the big Burgundian who was showing off some fencing feat. I beckoned my friend the cloth merchant.

"'Lieutenant Clermont,' said I, 'we are old comrades. Doubtless you have some excellent reason for this disguise—'

"'The best in the world, Chevalier—'

"'Well, I will hear the story in a moment, but for the present do me the favour to read this.'

"'Ha—ha! my dear Chevalier,' chuckled the Lieutenant, returning me the letter. 'You want my opinion, eh? Well, there's either woman or war in it *mon ami*,' he continued, with an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders.

"'I had decided to-night,' said I, 'to quit Paris for Amblemont. Certes my sword hangs loose in the scabbard, and is always at the service of France; but I would fain know who purposes to employ it.'

"'Yon fellow is keeping his eye on us, Chevalier,' interposed the Lieutenant. 'I trow he suspects me of knowing better how to handle a long sword than an ellwand.'

"'Seriously, Clermont,' said I, 'can you advise me?'

"'You know my complexion, de Crenan. *Ma foi!* now that I've filled my purse from the pocket of that young sprig of le Ferrand's, my hand itches for the hilt again. I shall only have to provide myself with a horse and boots, *mon ami*; and if you've stomach for the venture we'll take the field in company, *mon camarade*.'

"'Your sword?' I inquired.

"'Is here, monsieur,' and he tapped significantly a roll of cloth, which he carried in his character of merchant of Flanders.

"'Very good then, Lieutenant,' said I, 'it wants still some minutes to ten. At the first stroke of the hour we will bid master "Chien" show the way. Meanwhile, my friend, you shall tell me what brings you in this guise.'

"Calling the messenger, I flung a coin upon the table, bade him order a cup of wine, and be ready to leave when he heard St. Eustache chime for the hour.

"'You must know, Chevalier,' began the Lieutenant, 'that at Tonnerre I fell into bad hands, and, to be brief, I reached Paris minus my horse and riding-boots, and with but two beggarly crowns at the bottom of my pocket. But wit and good judgment coming to my assistance, I converted the crowns into pistoles and myself into an honest Flanders merchant.

"'At Cormier's, I knew the company I should meet. I knew that Lieutenant Clermont of the Grey Musketeers would be less likely to fill his pouch than a booby of a cloth merchant from Douay in Flanders.

"'I began with staking single crowns, which I lost, and ended as you saw, with a hundred pistoles, which I won; and that, Chevalier, is the whole story,' concluded the Lieutenant with a roguish twinkle in his eye, 'and there is St. Eustache preparing to strike, and your man making ready to leave.'

"We rose on the instant and followed the man out.

"Proceeding along the Rue des Prouvaires we took the direction of the Louvre.

"Clermont, elated with his winnings and prompted by the prospect of an adventure in front of him, struck at once into a merry tale.

"We were both laughing at the device by which the Abbess of Chelles outwitted the Cardinal, when suddenly the roll of cloth which ensheathed my companion's blade was struck from beneath his arm, while a blow from the butt of a musket was dealt him between the shoulders. At the same instant I felt myself seized from behind by two powerful arms, which gripped me firmly by the wrists, while I was pushed forwards towards a coach that came out of a side street, and drew up at the junction of the thoroughfares.

"Hearing the clash of steel, I managed by great effort to turn my head. Clermont had recovered his weapon and was engaged with the big Burgundian.

"At that moment I was persuaded that I had seen the fellow exchanging signals with the messenger at Cormier's. I just caught the glint of a whirling sword, before a cowl, pulled roughly over my head, effectually blindfolded me; and, dragged along by half-a-dozen vigorous arms, I was thrust into the coach in which the men must have been concealed.

"As soon as they had me inside, the horses set off at a trot. My wrists were secured with small cords, and the cowl was removed; but the window-lattice being up, I was unable to distinguish the features of my captors.

"In what direction were we going? The Bastille? Vincennes? The grated windows, the enormous walls, the frowning turrets rose before me.

"I wondered what had become of Clermont. I sought for the motive which should explain the action. I could discover nothing. Then again I saw Madame's face peering diligently into mine.

"At last unable to bear it longer, I determined to ask whither they were taking me.

"'Gentlemen,' I said, in as careless a tone as I could muster. 'Be so good at least as to inform me at whose orders I am arrested.'

"A surly voice made answer:

"'Monsieur must remain silent, otherwise monsieur will compel us to use the gag.'

"Having no desire to taste the 'pear,' I obeyed the

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hint, for at the first sound of the fellow's voice a cold sweat broke out upon me.

"Where had I heard that voice before? I had laughed then, I remembered. Open danger had no terror for me.

"Three years before, when serving in the guards of the Prince de Condé, I had received orders to follow and overtake a certain person who had left Paris for Nanci with letters for the Duc de Lorraine. These letters I was to bring back.

"The man was said to be accompanied by only a single comrade; and, as I was instructed to take with me four men, it seemed there would be little difficulty in accomplishing the task.

"I came up with the quarry at a hamlet some few leagues beyond Meaux; but instead of having only two men to deal with, there were four, and as one of my knaves had cast a shoe at Lagny we were equally matched. There was nothing for it but to fall on, and singling out the Duke's courier, which I did from the description furnished me in Paris, I rode straight at him. So sudden was the onset that he was unhorsed in a twinkling; and sword at throat I demanded the letters he was carrying to the Duc de Lorraine. With an oath he denied that he bore any letter or that he served the Duke.

"I proceeded to search him; he sneering the while and telling some tale of the Duke's messenger having passed through Meaux three hours before.

"Calling to one of my men who was searching the fellow's saddle-bags, I bade him rip up the saddle. But the rascal at that instant reaching for his cap which had fallen from him as he came to the ground, I made a snatch at it. The change in the rogue's countenance told me I had secured the prize. The letters were concealed in the lining.

"Unfortunately, as it fell out, the man carried other letters than the *billet doux* of Madame Vernet, and these also came into the hands of the Prince de Condé.

"But leaving almost immediately to join the King's forces in Italy, matters of greater moment thrust the Prince's affairs out of mind.

"All that it has taken so long to tell flashed through my brain in a single instant. The man I had pulled from his horse beyond Meaux, was the man whose voice had replied to me out of the depths of the carriage.

"Whilst I was still trying to digest the discovery, the coach stopped. Three raps given upon the panel were replied to, the cowl was hastily thrust over my head, and the coach went rumbling on through another street. Presently it stopped a second time, the door was flung open and I was bidden to alight.

"Passing through a wicket in dead silence, we traversed a large courtyard, eventually reaching the foot of a flight of stairs which I was bidden to mount. At the top we seemed to come out on a sort of gallery.

"Suddenly a bell sounded close at hand. The cords which bound my wrists were removed. I was hurried along. The hood was pulled from my head, and I found myself in a small ante-chamber lighted by a solitary candle. With me were four men at arms, whose faces for all they told might have been cast in metal. At the same moment a slip door opening noiselessly in the wall disclosed a vast *salon* beyond.

"My guards motioned me forward, the door closed silently behind us; two of the men posting themselves in front of it, while their comrades escorted me to a long narrow table on which six candles of perfumed wax were burning in silver candlesticks. Across the further end of the chamber was stretched a heavy curtain of purple damask. I had just reached the table, when, the curtain parting in the middle, two cavaliers in masks advanced into the room.

"'Chevalier,' said the taller of the two, addressing me without preface or apology. 'I have questions to ask. Be careful how you answer. Do you remember a journey which a certain gentleman in the guards of the Prince de Condé undertook on a night in the year 1640?'

"'Pardon, monsieur,' I replied. 'Is it forbidden to know in whose presence I have the honour of standing?'

"Now I was satisfied that the man who had spoken was not the Duc de Lorraine; moreover, from the elegance of the hands as well as by the diminutiveness of the daintily shod feet, I was convinced that his companion was a woman.

"'It matters nothing. Answer the question.'

"'I remember,' I answered shortly.

"'At Meaux you robbed a courier of his letters?'

"'As a soldier, monsieur, I obeyed——'

"'You trifle with the question,' he broke out fiercely. 'When you performed that service for your employer, Chevalier, you condemned an unfortunate son of *la belle France* to a dungeon in Angoulême'—I knew then that he was de Châteauneuf—'and imperilled the life of a woman powerful enough to be feared by the great Cardinal.'

"'The correspondence of Madame Vernet with the Duc de Lorraine might possess some interest for the Prince de Condé; but the letters of Marie Michou were not exactly *billets-doux*, Chevalier.'

"'Marie Michou?' said I. 'You mean the Duchess de Chevreuse, Marquis?'

A slight movement came from the slim, silent form at the table.

"'Monsieur,' I said, impressed that the silent mask was no other than Madame de Chevreuse herself. 'I had lately the honour to be the bearer of a message to the Duchess——'

"'And Madame failed not to afford you the protection of her roof.'

"'My comprehension must be at fault, Marquis.'

"'I will assist it. Grosjean, Lorraine's courier was in the courtyard. Is that enough, monsieur?'

"'Madame may very well have had her reasons,' I answered sulkily. 'I came from La Porte.'

"'*Diable!* Does the Duchess then owe *you* protection?—a cut-throat in the pay of Condé. *Pasque-dieu!*' he thundered, 'the Duchess owes you nothing—nothing monsieur, but a short shrift and a——' he stopped abruptly, and glared at me through the eye-holes in his mask. 'Listen, monsieur' he began again, 'the overtures between the Palais and the Hôtel de Chevreuse are broken off, and Madame finds herself to-day in gravest peril. The letters of Marie Michou, which the Chevalier de Crenan handed to his master the Prince de Condé, are in the private cabinet of Cardinal Mazarin. They must be recovered.'

"'Pardon me, monsieur, if I fail to comprehend.'

"'*Ganache!*' he cried, stamping his foot. I remained silent.

"'Monsieur,' continued the Marquis, speaking thickly. 'The Hôtel has failed. The Palais has triumphed. At any moment Madame may receive a *lettre de cachet*.'

"'Monsieur, you misapprehend——'

"'Not at all—not at all!' he interrupted. 'The letters must be recovered.'

"'*Nom de Dieu!*' I exclaimed. 'How——?'

"'Will you swear, on the breviary?' he shouted.

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'Will you swear, monsieur, to obey faithfully the instructions Madame will——'

"'No, monsieur,' I said stoutly, wishing to end the business. 'I obey none but the King. I have no reason to love his eminence; but I refuse to soil my hands for an enemy of the Prince.'

"'Varlet!' he roared. 'Will not the mischief you have done content you, but you must add insult to injury? Madame——'

"'I spoke of the Marquis de Châteauneuf, monsieur,' answered I coldly.

"'—Ssh! The Duchess, madman! The Duchess! The Marquis asks nothing from you. Does the Chevalier de Crenan refuse reparation to a lady?'

"'Duchess or Marquis, methinks 'tis the same thing, monsieur.'

"The silent figure clutched him by the arm.

"'*Un outrage*' he exclaimed hotly. 'You must fight, Chevalier. *Nom d'un chien!* You shall beg your life of Madame upon your knees.'

"'At your service, Monsieur le Marquis,' said I, bowing, 'but your people having deprived me of my sword, and favoured me with these marks of attention'—I showed my wrists still red and swollen from the pressure of the cords—'I am sorry I cannot oblige you at the moment. To-morrow, monsieur, I shall be pleased to give you a meeting.'

"'To-morrow!' he sneered. 'You make very free with to-morrow. Here—and now, if you please, monsieur.'

"'Men do not fight duels in a salon, and by candlelight,' I answered with a touch of scorn.

"'We will set the fashion, Chevalier.'

"'Or without seconds and in the presence of a woman, Marquis.'

"'*Morts diables!*' he roared, and unlocking a cabinet flung upon the table three rapiers.

"'Choose, monsieur, choose!'

"'And if I refuse?'

"'I will have you beaten by the lackeys and dragged through the kennels.'

"'Pardon, monsieur!' I said tartly, picking up a weapon at hazard.

"Across the table the Marquis eyed me keenly.

"'We are not here to amuse ourselves, Chevalier.'

"'You keep the business waiting, Marquis,' said I, bringing my sword to the guard.

"'You are in a great hurry to be killed,' he rejoined in his gibing fashion.

"'It is for that purpose I have been brought here,' I retorted. 'You are well served, Marquis, by your cowardly gang of hired assassins. But I am a soldier, monsieur; and a soldier does not betray the man whose bread he has eaten and whose badge he has worn. You have the advantage of me, Marquis.'

"'*Mon Dieu!*' cried a shrill voice in anger. 'But I will stop the mouth of this *polisson*,' and snatching up the weapon which lay in waiting on the table, the silent mask rushed in upon me with avid impetuosity.

"But in a twinkling the Marquis had planted himself, in front of me; while I, mistrusting the intentions of the lady, retreated till I had the protection of the wall at my back.

"We lunged and parried and returned upon each other.

"The sweat stood in great drops upon my brow. My wrist, stiff and weak from the bonds which had bound it, burnt as if clasped by a bracelet of fire.

"The Duchess followed each pass with glittering eyes.

"Once, I slit his doublet, and I saw the rapier tremble in Madame's hand.

"Once, I pricked his forearm, and Madame made to run in on me; but the Marquis waved her aside.

"My wrist, which had lost its suppleness, was fast losing its power. I was no longer able to force down my opponent's blade far enough to give me a chance for his breast.

"I fought on doggedly, never taking my eyes off the other's point; but never doubting how the affair would end. I was not to escape.

"Within the apartment, all was silent, save for the clash of steel upon steel.

"My head, however, was full of strange noises—a confused medley of sounds. Whether penetrating from without or merely springing from the tension within, I was ignorant. The business in hand required all my attention.

"The next pass however brought the explanation.

"The Marquis, making a determined effort to run me through, suddenly staggered and fell, his weapon dropping from his grasp as he came to the floor—at the same instant the reflection of flames was seen through the curtained windows of the apartment, the crash of a thunderbolt broke over the hotel, and I was aware of a stinging sensation in my left shoulder. It was Madame's rapier.

"Doubtless, the Duchess supposed the Marquis to have fallen to my weapon; whereas, he had received a shock from the lightning which had fired the building.

"In a moment the chamber seemed to grow crowded. There was a sound of many voices. The north wing was in flames.

"I have a remembrance of hearing someone say, 'Throw this *canaille* in the gutter.' Then I must have lost consciousness.

"When I came to myself I was in my old quarters at Cormier's. Clermont, who had beaten off the Burgundian, had found me, bleeding and senseless, on the causey of the Rue Dominique.

"I was nigh done for, but Youth—divine Youth, messieurs, denied the fall; and, on the last day of October we set out to join the King's army at Colmar.

"Gentlemen!—the flagon's empty."

H. Hunter.

Google

Was He a Hero?

I knew Louis Mayne very well in the old student days when we used to take our meals together.

Louis had the deep eyes, the pale complexion, and the long and dishevelled hair of all those young men who came to town from the country to conquer glory.

He was a writer. I soon found his name in weekly journals and reviews, and then he began to write those short and exquisite sketches which have made his reputation. Thus five years passed, when I met him one day in the editor's office of a journal for which I worked.

Each of us was as much pleased as the other at thus meeting again; and after the first, "What! is that you? Is that you?" we stood facing each other, shaking hands and exposing, in a laugh of cordial delight, our teeth, which in old times we used to exercise on the same crust of poverty. He had not changed. He had not even sacrificed his long hair, which he threw back with the graceful movement of a horse who tosses his mane.

Only he had the clear complexion and calm eye of a contented man, and his slim figure was clad in most fashionable costume.

"We won't drift apart again, will we?" said he affectionately, taking me by the arm; and he led me to the Embankment gardens, where the April sun gilded the young leaves of the trees.

Ah, happy day! How we exhausted the "Don't you remember?" "Don't you remember the fried eggs which tasted of straw, and the dreadful rice milk, the melancholy air of your landlady, and the German who used to pawn his watch every three months?"

Those days of hardship for Louis were finished. He had from afar applauded my success, as I had watched his. But one thing I did not know, and that was that he had married a woman whom he adored, and that he had a charming little girl.

"Come and see them; you shall dine with me."

I let myself be persuaded, and he took me off to a pretty suburb, where he lived in a cottage among the trees. There everything made you welcome. No sooner had we opened the door of the garden than a young dog frisked about our feet.

"Down, Dick! He will soil your clothes."

But at the sound of the bell Mrs. Mayne appeared at the steps with her little daughter in her arms. An imposing and beautiful blonde, her well-moulded figure wrapped in a blue gown.

"Put on a plate more. I've an old friend with me."

And the happy father, caressing his little girl, showed me all over his establishment—the dining room, prettily decorated with freshly-cut flowers; the study abounding in books, with its window opening out on the green turf, so that a puff of wind had strewn with rose leaves the printers' proofs which were scattered on the table.

"This is only a beginning, you know. It wasn't so long ago that we were working for three halfpence a line."

And while I luxuriated under a blossoming Judas tree which I saw in the garden, Mayne, at ease in his home, had slipped into his working coat, put on his slippers, and, lying on his sofa, caught little Helen up in his arms to toss her in the air—"Houp la! Houp la!"

I do not remember ever to have had a more perfect impression of contentment. We dined pleasantly—two good courses, that was all; a dinner without pretence.

The charming wife presided with a bright smile, having her child by her side in a high chair. She spoke but little, but her sweet and intelligent attention followed our light and paradoxical chat, the good-humoured fooling of men of letters, and at the dessert she took a rose from the bouquet which ornamented the table, and placed it in her hair near her ear with supreme grace. She was indeed that lovely and silent friend whom a dreamer requires.

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We took our coffee in the study—they intended to furnish the drawing-room very soon with the price of a story to be published by Levy; then, as the evening was cool, a fire of sticks and twigs was built; and while we smoked Mayne and I, recalling old memories, the mistress of the house, holding on her knees little Helen now ready for bed, made her repeat her evening prayers, which the little one lisped, rubbing her little feet together before the warm flame.

Little Helen.

We saw each other again, often at first, then less frequently, the difficult and complicated life of literary labour taking us each his own way. So the years passed. We met, shook hands. "Everything going well?" "Splend dly." And that was all. Then, later, I found the name of Louis Mayne but rarely in the journals and periodicals. "Happy man; he is resting," I said to myself, remembering that he was spoken of as having made a small fortune. Finally, last autumn, I learnt that he was seriously ill.

I hurried to see him. He still lived at the pretty suburb; but on this sombre day of the last of November the little house seemed cold, and looked naked among the leafless trees. It seemed to me shrunken and diminished, like everything that we have not seen for a long time.

The dog was probably dead, for his bark no longer answered the sound of the bell when I passed the little gate and entered the garden, all strewn with dead leaves where the night's frost had withered the last chrysanthemums.

It was not his wife—she was absent—it was Helen who received me—Helen who had grown to be a big girl of fourteen, with an awkward manner. She opened for me the door of her father's study, and brusquely lifting her great black lashes turned on me a timid and distressed glance.

I found Mayne huddled in an easy chair in the corner of the fireplace, wrapped in a sort of dressing-gown, with grey locks streaking his long hair, and by the cold, clammy hand which he reached towards me, by the pallid face which he turned upon me, I knew that he was lost.

Horrible. I found in my unhappy friend that worn and ruined look which used to strike us formerly among the poor Poles we used to see.

"Ah, well, old man, things are not going well?"

"Deucedly bad, my boy," he answered.

Mayne, looking at me, seemed to pity my efforts.

I was silent.

"Look," said he, pointing to his table; "see my desk. For six months I have not been able to write."

I made a new attempt to revive him. Die, at his age. Nonsense. He wasn't taking care of himself. He must pass the winter in the south; drink a good draught of sunlight. He could. He was easy in his money matters.

But he stopped me, putting his hand on my arm.

"Listen," he said gravely. "We have seen each other seldom, but you are my oldest, perhaps my best friend. You have proved me pen in hand. Well, I am going to tell you something in confidence for you to keep to yourself unless it may serve on some occasion to discourage the young literary aspirants who bring their manuscripts to you—always a praiseworthy action.

"'Yes, I have been successful. Yes, I have been paid a shilling a line. Yes I have made money, and there in that drawer are a certain number of yellow, green, and orange papers from which a coupon is clipped every six months, and which represent £200 of income. It is rare in our profession, and to gain that poor hoard I have been obliged to imitate the unsociable virtues of a miser, know how to deny a jewel to my wife, a dress to my daughter. But at last I have that money. And often said to myself, if I should die their bread is assured, and here is a little marriage portion for Helen! And I was content—I was proud.

"But for all that, my boy, it is necessary that I should not linger. Sickness is expensive, and already it has been necessary to sell one or two bonds from that drawer. To seek the sunlight as you suggest, to bask like a lizard in the tropics, one more bond must go, and there would not be enough to last to the end if I should wait for seven or eight years more, now that I can no longer write. Happily there is nothing to fear. But what I have suffered since I have been incapable of writing, and have felt my hoard of gold shrink and diminish in my hand like the 'Magic Skin' of Balzac, is frightful. Now you understand me, do you not? and you will no longer bid me take care of myself."

Fifteen days later some thirty of us followed the hearse which carried Louis Mayne to the cemetery. It had snowed the day before, and Dr. Arnold, the old frequenter of painter's studios, the friend and physician of the dead man, walking beside me, called in his brusque voice—

"Very commonplace, but always terrible, the contrast; a burial in the snow—black on white. The funeral of the poor. Brr!"

At last we came to the edge of the grave. The place and the time were sad. Under a cloudy sky the yew trees, swayed by the wind, threw down their burdens of melted snow. The bystanders had formed a circle, and were watching the grave diggers, who were lowering the coffin by cords.

Suddenly, as the burial service began, Dr. Arnold seized me by the arm and whispered in my ear:

"You know that he killed himself?"

I looked at him with astonishment. But he pointed to the group in black, composed of a pretty widow and her daughter, who were sobbing under their long veils and clasping each other in a tragic embrace, and he added:

"For them. Yes, for six months he threw all his medicine in the fire, and designedly committed all sorts of imprudences. He confessed it to me before his death. I had not understood it at all—I, who had expected to prolong his life at least three years. The other night, when it was freezing cold, he left his window open, as if by forgetfulness, and was taken with bleeding at the lungs. Yes, that he might leave bread for those two women. The clergyman does not dream that he is blessing a suicide.

"But what of it, my good fellow? Mayne is in the paradise of the brave."

B. Lovell.

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The Mysterious Letters.

HAVE you ever, on making a call, thought you had hung your hat up on the hall rack, and when leaving sought there vainly for the very hat which, perhaps, you were holding in your hand? If you have, you know how unpleasant this little trick of your brain jarred your reason, in spite of your voluntary apology that "it was only a mistake, a trifling, absent-minded mistake, after all."

It was all because of just such a little mistake on the part of Mrs. Starr, that foolish persons who postulate "marriage is a failure" used to point triumphantly at Starr and his wife.

Still, when they were joined together for better or for worse, no couple could have been more devotedly in love with one another than they were. This forms a rather sad, but, I think, profitable little story.

Now that the principals concerned are dead and gone, the physician who attended Mrs. Starr says I am at liberty to tell the tale. He laughs, as he is entitled to, at the construction I put upon the facts, but inconsistently evades sitting in judgment on the case.

Men remember Mrs. Starr as the beautiful Miss Snell, for her face in those days was a face that no man could quite forget. She was the most utterly ruthless coquette of her day. The family means, in her generation, had fallen far below what was necessary to keep up the prestige of the family name.

Her father and mother never ceased to lament that fact, and Miss Snell was dutifully impressed in her early girlhood with the fact that her beauty must win back the departed family glories by social achievements. How well it did everybody knows.

By a mere coincidence, among the persons chained by her smiles was a boy who did not have much of anything but a naval commission, some brass buttons, and a sword.

This business with the boy was quite unnecessary. Miss Snell had nothing to gain by winning the boy's love; still, she even went out of her way to do it. The boy avoided her because he knew she was unobtainable for him, and because the first time he looked into her eyes he knew, with but half a chance, he would love her very badly. Miss Snell knew it, too, but if the boy had not avoided her, she would not have done what she did.

She was engaged to another man at the time—it was her third—and she deliberately broke that engagement that she might be free to deal with the boy. This was most effectually accomplished.

He was a queer mixture of poet and sailor, the boy was, and Miss Snell was a little shocked at the tempest she invoked within him. There was something in his glorious avowal of love that made former protestations pale into insignificance. It carried her away for the moment, and she gave him her lips and she gave him her promise, knowing very well in her heart of hearts it was the old story of love on one side and submission on the other. But marriage on his pay was impossible, so the boy went off to his ship, and Miss Snell back to her triumphs in the social whirl of the city.

The letters that came to her from every port the boy's ship made, were rather remarkable. They were of a new species. The writer seemed to have an uncanny divination of everything the woman he loved did or thought. In spite of that, an immeasurable love breathed forth from every line. No man should write the things he wrote to any living woman.

At last a letter came from Honolulu that was so touching in its pathos, so abject in its devotion, and still so marvellously prophetic in its conception of Miss Snell's life, that she felt called upon to write him some truths. This was just about the time she met Starr, and fell a victim herself to the passion she had trifled with so often.

When the boy received her letter he went down to his quarters, and blew his brains out. For decency's sake the surgeon called it a pistol-cleaning accident, but he was brutal enough to send back a blood-splashed letter that he found all twisted up in the boy's hand to the woman who wrote it far away at home.

The night before the Starr-Snell nuptials Miss Snell did what all other girls would have done—religiously burnt all those fantastic, extravagant letters the boy had written her. It was rather peculiar that she found the red-stained letter which had been the boy's death warrant, and his last letter to her from Honolulu, lying together in her drawer apart from all the others, heaped carelessly in a compartment of her escritoire.

She did not remember putting them away among her laces and her bonbonnières, but there they were, so she took them over to the fire a little gingerly, and tossed them after their fellows into the dancing flames.

Then she sat down and watched them curl and crinkle in the eager, lapping flame, till the draught caught the feathery black ashes and carried them up the sooty chimney. Speculation on Miss Snell's thoughts at this time is, I think, entirely problematical.

Popular fancy has it that just before death, and just before marriage, one's thoughts grow rapt—abstracted, and that the faces of old loves, and the faces of old friends come to look in on one as they knew one in bygone days. So it is reasonable to suppose that, as Miss Snell languidly reposed in the glow of her bedroom hearth, among the faces that chased one another across her mental vision was the haggard, appealing face of the boy; this, however, it is not given to us to know.

The wedding on the following day was an event of social importance, and it came off with great *éclat*. But the crowds, and the music, and the flowers, and even the six charming Watteau shepherdesses with ribboned crooks, who were the bridesmaids, do not concern us here. Let us pass on.

Hardly had the couple returned from their wedding journey, when Starr called on the doctor, and told him he was worried about the health of his wife.

"Mrs. Starr," he said, "was in an unaccountably nervous and hysterical condition, and was growing more wan and hollow-eyed as each day went by."

The man of medicine went and looked at her, found

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that this was true, prescribed the usual remedies, and continued to visit her occasionally; but he did not learn the cause of her trouble till some time had expired, and, when he did learn, it was from Mrs. Starr's own lips that part of it came, Starr himself not only corroborating in general all she said, but adding a great deal more.

The first evening of their honeymoon, when unpacking her things, Mrs. Starr was rather unnerved to find all covered up among the dainty feminine belongings in the tray of her trunk the two identical love letters that she had watched burn and fly up the black chimney flue. Unexplainable as their presence was, she could only put it down to a mistaken impression on her part, and she made certain to destroy them this time beyond question or doubt.

Into a gas jet she hastily thrust them, and a second time she watched the flame creep over the unwelcome letters, turning them into two charred black curls which fell in broken flakes on the floor, and there were ground into impalpable dust by two angry little heels. That this was not witnessed by her husband is almost unnecessary to add.

When Mrs. Starr found the very same letters in the very same place a day or so after, a thrill of alarm chilled her through and through. With sickening dread she tore them into a hundred fragments and threw them fearfully out of her window into the hurly-burly of a winter storm.

Although she became positively ill from her scare at the supernatural reappearance of the letters, she did not tell her husband about the matter, but, woman-like, tried to pray herself into the belief that it was only a mistake after all—a mere common, ordinary, everyday mistake. And this was wrong.

In a short time the couple returned, and Mrs. Starr's condition so alarmed her husband that he called on her physician. She kept the cause of her trouble entirely secret, but how often she found and destroyed those two mysterious letters during this time is not known.

Physically she rapidly grew worse, though her husband showered on her a wealth of loving care and affection. Her peace of mind and her happiness were fast becoming utterly destroyed.

One night Starr awoke, and in the half light he saw the white-robed figure of his wife on her knees before an open drawer. She seemed to be holding something in her hands, which she was regarding with a look of terror.

"What is wrong, sweetheart? Does anything trouble you?" asked Starr soothingly.

At the sound of her husband's voice the woman carried her hands to her face and rose. Then she tottered over towards him, repeating mechanically, in a low whisper of despair:

"Oh, Heaven! Oh, Heaven!"

When she reached her couch she sank back on her pillows, choking with dry, tearless sobs.

Starr rose and turned on the light, and looked to see what had alarmed his wife; in vain, for there was nothing there. All that a loving man could do to compose and quiet her, he did.

In the lull that followed she told him something—not all—of the strange reappearances of those letters, just enough to startle him and arouse his curiosity; but he was wise enough at the time not to ask to see them or ask anything else about them. Nevertheless, he determined to watch very carefully for their next manifestation and use drastic means for their disposal.

Mrs. Starr had found that attempts to destroy those letters were utterly useless, for they always came back, and besides, hating and loathing them as she did, they began to exert over her mind a marvellous fascination. Though she quivered when she saw the muddy red blots on her letter, she craved to look into it, and she was no more content with a mere glance at its Honolulu post mark than at the neat letter-head of the other. So she commenced to read them—lingeringly, feeling all the while that at every word she read she was driving another nail into the coffin of her happiness.

This harrowing desire to contemplate those letters came to her most often at night, and then she would rise from her husband's side, steal over to her drawer, and mumble away in the dim yellow light the things the Boy wrote to her before she killed him.

Of course, her husband saw her doing this one night, and he went over to her with loving caresses, which, strange to say, she recoiled from as if they had been blows.

Perhaps that was why Starr foolishly asked her why she was standing there muttering those nonsensical things. In answer she held her hands in front of his face—just exactly as you would hold a letter for a person to read—and Starr saw there was absolutely nothing in her hands; but he did not say so to her.

He asked her quietly to read the letter to him, and thereby wrought his own and her undoing.

Mrs. Starr read the letters to him—both of them—from date to superscription, in a low metallic monotone, for all the world as if the real writing were in her hands.

The letter from the boy came first, and before two lines were read Starr knew—what only a few people did know—that his wife had given her pledge and her kisses to the boy long before she gave them to himself.

The boy said: "he went down on his knees in his cabin at night and prayed that he might die, if that would only make the happiness of the woman he loved." Oh, that was not all he said. He wrote things that it is better not to mention or print. And he told of long, clinging kisses given and taken, "kisses that had taught him why it is the world is sometimes bartered for a woman's kiss."

It was too much for poor Starr—too much for any husband to hear from any wife's lips—and because it was only a phantom, a memory, that could not be explained, it seemed ever so much the worse.

When Mrs. Starr finished reading her reply to the boy's letter, her husband had collapsed, and was only semi-conscious. Then she bent down and electrified him by pointing with her finger to certain round brown splashes, unseen by him, which she whispered were "Blood! blood!"

Starr gave a great cry and rushed out of the bedroom. Half-an-hour later, white and shaking, he told the doctor his wife was mad, and added, rather brokenly, that he felt he "could never bear to see her again."

Up to the very last Mrs. Starr continued to find those letters every day. She found them hidden under dainty, fragrant *lingerie* in her drawer, under her pillow at night, and sometimes even in the very bosom of the dress she wore. In agony she was doomed to read them over and over again, till she could read no more.

There are people who do not know why Starr and his wife drifted away from one another, and who are inclined to call Starr a brute.

But the saddest part of it all is this: for Starr's sake the woman would have gone on her hands and knees through all the world—so much I know.

E. Biggs.

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A LIVING TOMB.

FOUR years ago I spent the summer in France. July found me in the Department of Calvados, Normandy, at a village near Caen, a mine of antiquities. The curé, Father Aloysius, showed me everything which he thought would interest a stranger. As some slight return for his kindness I asked him to lunch with me. We went to the hotel.

Very old, with snowy hair, and face as ruddy as a pippin of his province, my companion carried sunshine wherever he went. He had a cheery greeting for all, and it was easy to see that all venerated him.

"Yes, monsieur, my people know me," he said in answer to some remark. "Forty-seven years I have laboured among them. It is almost a lifetime. The church has called me often; my friends say I might have been a bishop, but I could not leave."

A group of men, excitedly gesticulating, stood round the hotel door. They came to meet us hurriedly.

"Have you heard, Father—have you heard?" they cried.

"No, my friends," he answered; "what is the news?"

Several spoke at once, but this is the gist of what they said:

"You know the old castle is sold? To a rich bourgeois—yes? The place is tumbling down—he will have it repaired. Pierre Valois and Jean Prudhomme went with their tools this morning—to take down some masonry. M. Grousset—the purchaser—he was there, too. They found a skeleton—in the wall!"

"Sacred Name!" cried the priest, white as a corpse. "At Vallon? No! Not a mile away? Impossible!"

"It is true."

Father Aloysius turned to me. He shook like a man with the ague.

"You will pardon me, monsieur? I must go at once. This is a great discovery. I will verify it and return."

He hastened away; I lunched alone.

It was four o'clock when he came back, still pale and very subdued.

"I have been rude," he said. "I crave again a thousand pardons. I could not tear myself away. Forty-seven years I have sought what chance has brought to light to-day. You shall hear.

"Forty-seven years ago I came to this village. I had been asked to take charge of it in the absence of the curé. It was my second night here—so dark one could not see one's hand. I was tired, I had been visiting the sick. I lay down in my soutane and slept. A loud knocking awoke me.

"'Who is there?' I cried.

"'Friends of the Church,' a voice answered.

"I opened the door; two men entered, tall and well-dressed. I could not see their faces, they wore masks.

"'Are you the curé?' said the man who had answered me—a foreigner by his accent.

"I explained.

"'No matter,' he said, 'one priest is as good as another. A man is dying; he wishes to receive absolution; will you go?'

"I hesitated. 'Will you explain why you wear those masks?' I said.

"He laughed. 'It is the simplest thing in the world—we do not wish to be recognised. Now will you go? Your poor will benefit.'

"'I am ready,' I replied.

"A carriage stood outside the door; my poor lamp revealed it. I entered it with the spokesman. The other mounted the box. Many times the carriage turned completely round.

"'Does your companion not know the way?' I asked.

"'It is very dark,' was the reply.

"I have been reminded of the circumstance, apparently trivial, to-day. At the time I expected nothing. I know now that the carriage was turned to confuse me. My companion was taciturn. He answered me 'no'; 'yes.'

"Many miles we travelled—twenty or more. Two hours we had journeyed when the carriage stopped in a paved yard.

"'We alight here,' said my companion.

"I followed him; the coachman descended. I could not see him, I could not distinguish the carriage.

"'Is it necessary to blindfold the priest?' he asked.

"'No,' was the reply.

"I was disquieted, but not afraid. A poor monk need not fear robbers.

"'Give me your hand,' said my fellow traveller.

"I obeyed. He led me along a passage between high walls; the sounds told me. We crossed another paved yard, and climbed a stone staircase. The apartment we entered was flagged. My guide halted.

"'The priest is here,' he said in a loud voice. I saw nothing. His voice echoed as if in an empty room of vast size.

"'Where is the dying man?' I asked.

"'Stand close to the wall.'

"He placed me in position. Cold air struck my face—a draught. There was a cavity.

"'The priest is here,' my guide repeated.

"Then I heard another voice, very faint, as of a man near death. 'Is he alone?' it said.

"'No,' I answered. 'One of the men who brought me here stands before me.'

"The poor wretch sighed.

"'I will retire,' said my companion. His footsteps sounded like those of one walking in a vault. The dying man heard.

"'You are alone now,' he said.

"'Yes,' I answered; 'speak on.'

"He did so. 'Ah! monsieur. I thought I was dreaming.

"'I am near death. I need the last rites of the Church,' he said.

"'Confess your sins,' I answered.

"'My sins are trivial,' he returned. 'I would speak of a great crime. I occupy a cell twice the width of my body—I know not where. I am condemned to die of starvation—I know not why. I have never injured a fellow creature.'

"My blood boiled.

"'Speak on,' I repeated.

"'My name is Jules Davoust,' he resumed. 'I am of Caen, and well known. I was a happy man until I met Sophia Polinski, ay, afterwards I was happy. She is Polish, of noble family; so she told me. Ah! father, she is beautiful. I loved her—I love her still. She returned my passion. I am only a tradesman, but we

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were married; two months of bliss were mine. One day she came to me trembling. "Fly," she said, "fly at once!" She would not explain. I had my business, my little shop; I had done no wrong; I refused. That night she disappeared. Next day I received a note, written by her hand. She bade me meet her in the wood, at a secluded place known to us both. I went. She was not there. It was dark. I called her by name. Two men came up, seized and gagged me, forced me into a carriage, and brought me here. I am condemned without trial. My gaolers tell me that I must die, or a noble name will be dishonoured. There is nothing more. I was permitted to choose the manner of death. Aid me, if you can; but give me absolution now.'

"I absolved him. I bade him have courage. I assured him that he would be free in a few hours. My guide returned.

"'I have heard your words,' he said. 'You cannot aid him. If I thought you could, you would share his fate.'

"He took my hand, and led me to the carriage, entering with me. The coachman whipped his horses; they galloped. I pleaded for the poor man. My companion was dumb. I threatened him with the law. He answered not a word. I pictured the vengeance of an offended Providence; he was stone. I vowed to devote my life to the discovery and punishment of his crime; still not a word. But I have kept and will keep my vow. A faint grey light was growing in the east when we reached the curé's door. I alighted. A purse was thrust into my hand. The carriage disappeared.

"Two hours later the gendarmes were scouring the country. They discovered nothing. Seven days I passed visiting châteaux and houses to no purpose. Then I went to Caen. I found the home of Jules Davoust. Both he and his wife were missing. The neighbours described him, a very handsome man, incapable of committing a crime. His wife, they told me, was a beautiful woman with the air of a princess. She spoke French with a foreign accent, dressed in silk and satin and wore valuable jewels.

"The gendarmes wearied of the fruitless search, but I did not. I made my home here. I succeeded the curé. I mapped out the country and visited every château, save one, within a wide radius, every large house. Forty-seven years I have sought a clue. Come to the window."

I rose. Father Aloysius pointed to the old castle of Vallon, crowning a hill scarcely a mile distant.

"That is the château which I did not visit," he said. "It is so near, and I travelled many miles that night. There the tomb of Jules Davoust was discovered this morning. I have stood within it; it is a hole in the wall six feet high, by four wide. The stones behind which the poor wretch spoke to me bulged with the weight above, and the workmen pulled them down. The skeleton fell out. In my presence they replaced them. One stone, just the height of my head, was without mortar; it could have been removed easily. The two paved yards are there, the passage between the walls, the stone staircase, the big flagged room. I have no doubt at all. If the criminals are living they shall be brought to justice."

Twelve months afterwards I met Father Aloysius in Paris. He had just returned from Poland. An examination of the papers of the late owner of the château had resulted in the discovery that his grandfather had rented the place to a Polish gentleman who gave the name of Lubenski. The latter took it for a year, but at the end of six months apprised the proprietor that he no longer needed it.

"That is all we know," said the curé. "In Poland I learned nothing. Nor have the police been more successful."

"And the mystery is as far from being solved as ever?"

"Yes; I fear the truth will not be known until the day of judgment. I have imagined many things. The forty-eight years which have passed have been fruitful in curious reflections. I would dismiss the matter from my mind now if I could. But I fear that is impossible."

J. HARLAND.

FIFTY GOLDEN SOVEREIGNS
GIVEN AWAY EVERY WEEK.

Every week the Editor of SHORT STORIES addresses fifty envelopes to fifty people in various parts of the country. Inside each envelope he places a sovereign, and locks them away in his private safe.

SIMPLY TAKE A POST-CARD and address it to the Editor under the following conditions:

☞ Ask if a sovereign has been addressed to you, giving your full name and address clearly written in ink.

Fifty names and addresses have been picked out at random from directories, etc., etc.

No sovereign, however, will be awarded unless it is applied for, so it would be advisable for you to tell your friends to drop us a post-card, whether they are readers or not.

All applications for No. 10 distribution must reach us by December 12th, addressed to The 10th Sovereign Editor, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Each application must be made separately.

Result of the Seventh Distribution appears on page 760.

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A Fight with Fever.

A STORY OF FLORIDA.

"MILLY, can't you make that child leave off crying? I must finish ironing, 'cos Miss Mary told me to be sure and have 'em done by four o'clock, and I know by the way the sun is shining in that door it ain't far from that now. Take him down under the oak tree by the road to quiet him." Sarah hardly looked up from her ironing board, where lay the daintiest and snowiest of white wrappers, receiving the finishing touches from her skilful iron.

The kitchen was at torrid heat. In the great chimney glowed the wood fire, with the smoothing irons heating in front. Overhead was the burning afternoon heat of that August sun. Sarah stopped her ironing just a moment and wiped the perspiration from her brow. "You ain't a bit like your mother, my girl, you're too slow."

Milly, the girl thus spoken to, a child about eleven years old, reluctantly rose and picked up the crying child. She went down the path to a large spreading oak tree, which cast its cool, refreshing shade over the dusty road. She deposited the baby on the parched grass and proceeded to gather up leaves and twigs for his amusement. His cries were soon turned into joyful chatter, thanks to the change from the hot kitchen to the shade and open air.

Soon Milly's attention was attracted by the approaching rumble of what she thought was a carriage, with tall black plumes all over it. It was a hearse. With open mouth and wide-stretched eyes, she gazed curiously on.

The driver came up under the mighty oak and checked the heated horses to a halt. He inquired of the child how far it was to Rugton.

"I say, my girl, run and bring me a drink of water from the house yonder. I am nearly perished."

Milly's astonishment lent wings to her usually dilatory feet.

She ran back to the house for the water, and while there saw that Sarah had finished ironing and was gone with the clothes.

The driver drank long and often from Milly's jug until his thirst was fully appeased. Again taking his seat, the panting horses were given a crack of the whip and the hearse soon passed out of sight, leaving Milly standing by the roadside enveloped in a cloud of dust.

In the meantime Sarah, with her basket of clothes, delivered the result of her labours to Mrs. Fort, or "Miss Mary," as she was lovingly called.

"I'll put away the clothes this evening, and you can come for your basket and money in the morning, Sarah."

"Yes, ma'am, that's all right."

After a long conversation Sarah started to go, but stopped at the door to say:

"Miss Mary, ain't you got none of them good preserve figs? I've been feeling uncommonly poorly to-day and want something to put a good taste in my mouth."

Mrs. Fort knew what that meant and gave to her bountifully from the delicacies of the larder. The woman had practically been reared in Mrs. Fort's family and was a privileged servant.

Since Mrs. Fort had been widowed she looked upon Sarah as more than a servant.

She had also become her trusted nurse.

Promptly the next morning Sarah went for her basket and money.

"Milly was telling me about a curious carriage stopping down by the big oak tree for the hosses to rest yistiddy. The man asked her for a drink of water."

"Why that must have been the hearse taking old Mrs. Tapley to her home to be buried."

Just then a tall, manly boy came running in and heartily gave Mrs. Fort a loving kiss.

It was Dan, her fifteen-year-old son.

"Mr. Meade says old Mrs. Tapley died of yellow fever. He just received a telegram from the place where she died. It has recently been pronounced epidemic there."

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"Why, Sarah, if that is so, Milly and your baby will take it," said Mrs. Fort, who unselfishly always thought first of others.

Those who have never experienced yellow fever epidemic abroad can hardly realise the wild panic. All who can,

Young Dan Fort and Mr. Meade stood guard together one day.

flee as from certain death. Sorrow and fear overwhelm the land.

But yellow fever moves majestically on, conquering and slaying thousands. Short quarantines are instituted on the public roads. All the men have to serve in turn at the picket.

It so happened that young Dan Fort and Mr. Meade stood guard together one day. Mr. Meade was known everywhere as a man fond of his drams.

"Dan, if you will drink plenty of whisky, you won't have yellow fever," said Meade passing his flask over to Dan.

Dan refused.

"Why, you're a fool, boy. Right here in the face of yellow jack, to refuse to drink! when some of your best medical authorities say it is a safeguard against yellow fever!"

Still Dan rejected the whisky. Meade was chagrined after many fruitless attempts.

In the course of a few days little Milly took yellow fever. Mrs. Fort was in the cabin with food and medicine daily until herself stricken. She had been in poor health for years. Her case had puzzled many doctors until she had left them. At times she would faint away and the pale, cold form would seem almost lifeless. Hours would pass away before Sarah could restore her. The faithful woman had served her thus as companion, nurse and doctor.

On the fifth day after her attack the yellow fever expert pronounced Mrs. Fort dead. Orders were given for her to be buried at once. Such was the alarm and confusion that none were present but the immediate family. Disease germs liberate rapidly from a corpse, increasing the danger, so that the dead are required to be buried immediately.

Sarah was indignant that her beloved "Miss Mary" should be buried without religious ceremony. Mrs. Fort lay there still and cold. For the first time in her life Sarah felt the weight of responsibility. If she could just ask Miss Mary what to do—but the overwhelming grief that she would have that dear counsellor no more, completely engulfed her. Then a sudden thought leapt through her brain. Suppose Mrs. Fort was not dead! Hadn't she often fainted and been cold and unconscious for hours! Oh, Heavens! If they were to bury her alive!

Her brain was maddened between sorrow and this apprehension. Dan came to her relief.

"We cannot bury mother to-day. The coffin has been sent. But, Sarah, my mother shall not be buried until you are satisfied that she is dead," declared Dan.

His grief was momentarily cast aside at the possibility of his mother being buried while in what might be a death-like swoon. But no one would believe it and the orders were positive. So they, Sarah and her husband, the servants, and Dan, the son, agreed they would have a sham burial. Jack and Dan buried the coffin.

But Sarah took the body into one of the back rooms. She opened up the room where Mrs. Fort had been ill to make it appear that she was there no more. They intended, if she were really dead, to bury her at night and no one need ever be any the wiser.

Dan did not know much more. He was the next victim of yellow fever. Sarah had double work, as she dared not call in the yellow fever doctor now. But with her old-fashioned warm blankets and herbal concoctions she brought Dan through. Imagine his joy when he regained consciousness, and Sarah whispered:

"Don't let Miss Mary know. She is much better, but very weak."

Mrs. Fort never knew for months afterwards what a narrow escape she had had from being buried alive.

Meade was also stricken by "yellow jack." His body had been so long bound by drink that all earthly help could not avail.

He died at two o'clock one night.

When the frost came in the autumn, Dan Fort left for college. When he said good-bye to Sarah he placed a paper in her hand.

It was a deed to the cottage and land where she lived—a gift from his mother, presented in "consideration of faithfulness and love."

ARTHUR STEWART.

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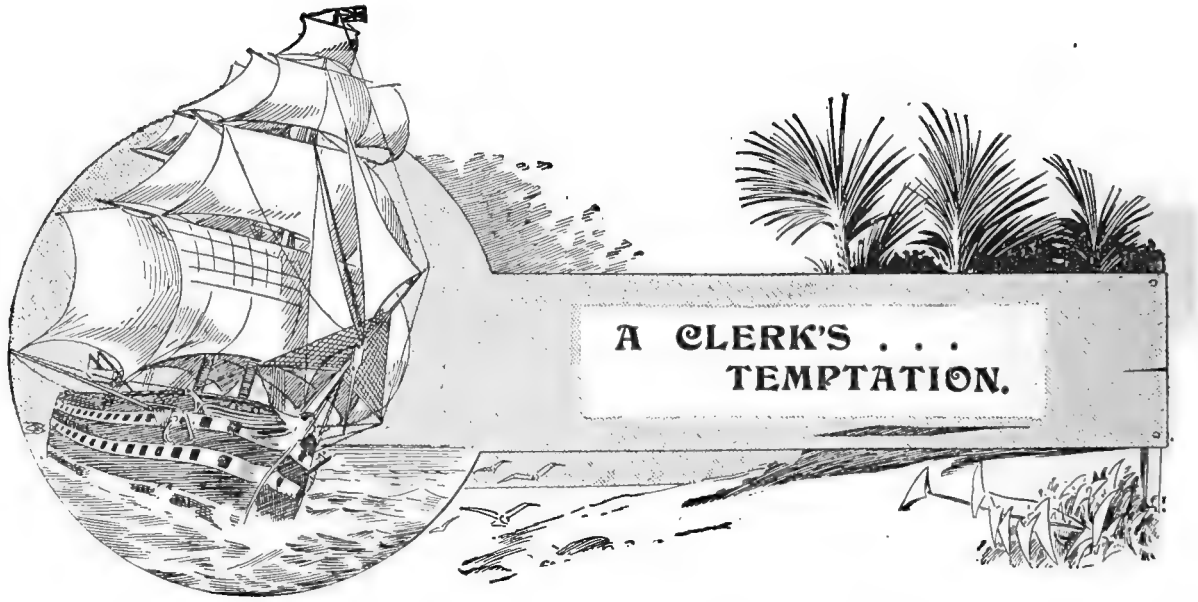
Author of "The Adventures of Captain Kettle" in

PEARSON'S MAGAZINE.



A CLERK'S . . . TEMPTATION.

It was after ten o'clock in the evening, but up in the fifth story of one of the modern office buildings, Prebbles still sat on his high stool, stooped over his books.

Prebbles was assistant book-keeper for the Jones and Marriott Company, Ltd. The Jones and Marriott Company was a corporation, and corporations, it is commonly supposed, are soulless. This could not have been the case with the Jones and Marriott concern, for it had ground the soul out of Prebbles; and if it had not absorbed that soul into its ledgers, day-books and journals, where then was it?

Prebbles had been so long beneath the upper and the nether millstones that he had become a part of the machine, and if he spoke of *our* foundry, *our* output, or *our* business, it was not because he felt a pride in them, particularly, but because he considered himself a part of the foundry, the output and the business.

Prebbles was tall and meagre. Thirty shillings a week is no temptation to high living, and after one reduces this stipend by paying fares and laundry bills, and purchasing a decent suit of clothes, spring and autumn, not a great amount is left for maintaining the body. But thirty shillings was all the Jones and Marriott Company could pay, so Prebbles toiled meekly on, and soothed his feelings with the reflections that *our* business would not totter and go to the wall simply because he demanded a "rise" and stuck to it.

Prebbles' face was painfully thin and pale; his eyes abnormally large and unusually dull for so bright a clerk, while his tawny hair was scanty and tinged with grey. Yet he was only thirty-five. Was it possible that ten years before, when he had entered the service of his employers, his face had been round and flushed with health, his blue eyes gleaming with hope and ambition, and his locks soft and abundant and without a silver line? It had become a tradition with Prebbles that this was so; but the health, the hope and ambition, and all the rest, had been absorbed in half-yearly dividends of five per cent. An acute mind was required to argue this question back from result to cause, and Prebbles' mind had long since ceased to be acute in dealing with anything outside of debits and credits.

With a patient sigh, Prebbles closed the ledger over which he had been poring, and picked up from the desk a hastily scrawled note, which read:

> The Jones and Marriot Company, Ltd.
>
> GENTLEMEN,—Four pounds a week was not enough for one holding the responsible position with you that I held. I could not live on it. If you had recognised merit, and had rendered me a just equivalent, I should not have been compelled to steal from you in order to eke out a livelihood. One thousand pounds, I think, will cover the amount I embezzled. Had it not been for Prebbles this would never have been discovered. Thanks to your stupidity, you did not believe him when he hinted that something was wrong. This delay affords me an opportunity to make off with the contents of the cash-box, which I do at once. You may follow, but you cannot find me.
>
> JOHN MORTIMER.

Prebbles had found this note tucked under the door when he had returned to the office after eating his late tea.

He had read it over at least a dozen times. His first impulse was to carry it straightway to Mr. Jones, but Mr. Jones had told him to work that night and seek to verify his first suspicions concerning Mortimer.

In Prebble's eyes, Jones was the personification of business acumen, and it might be wrong to allow the note to sway him from an assigned task.

If Prebbles reasoned wrongly, it was not his fault. Ten years of grind had rendered it impossible for him to reason very clearly on anything not appertaining to his particular line of work. So he had delved into the books, settled all doubts, and now, for the last time, he was reading Mortimer's note.

Nothing was now in the way of his taking the note to

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Mr. Jones' house. Folding up the bit of paper, he placed it carefully in his waistcoat pocket, then he removed his cuff protectors and laid them in one corner of a certain drawer; after that, he washed his hands, brushed his tawny hair, put on his coat and hat, put the books in the safe, turned off the electric light and started for the door.

Prebbles, however, had a sudden thought as his hand touched the knob of the office door. Why not examine the cash-box and see if the money were gone from it? Possibly one of the first questions Mr. Jones would ask would be whether he had done this. If he could say he had, a word of commendation might be dropped for his benefit, and commendation, however slight, was dear to poor Prebbles' faithful heart.

Groping his way back, he turned on the light, opened the safe and the private drawer. It was not locked, and he lifted the cash-box. That was not locked either. He threw back the lid and looked within. Yes, the money was gone.

All that the box contained was some valuable papers inclosed in long envelopes.

From some unaccountable cause, this further proof of Mortimer's guilt launched Prebbles into a reminiscent mood. Prebbles rarely allowed himself to become reminiscent. It was always harrowing. Now, however, with Mortimer's ruin staring him in the face, he unconsciously climbed upon his stool and looked back over the past, while his thin, bony fingers crept absently among the papers in the cash-box.

Nine years before—nine ages it seemed to Prebbles—before hope had faded and ambition had quite taken wings, he had forgotten himself so far as to fall in love.

His soul was his own. He had loved humbly, but he had loved devotedly. How devotedly, sleepless nights, if they might speak, and falling tears, if the world might see them, would bear witness.

But Prebbles had a rival and the girl, who had not the tact to read a human heart as plain as Prebbles', chose the rival. She did it calmly and deliberately; and still, for Prebbles, night succeeded day, and winter followed summer as they had done in the past, when he had foolishly allowed himself to hope.

Time will soften grief, if it may not kill, and when one has a soul willing to sacrifice itself to the interests of others, treasured wrongs are apt to die with treasured memories, so that life becomes an entire blank.

Mortimer was Prebbles' old-time rival and, while Prebbles pitied Mortimer, his heart grew sick when he thought of Mortimer's deserted wife and children.

Strange how that thought touched a vital nerve in Prebbles' being! His ability to think, outside the well-worn groove, astonished him. How could he help Mortimer's wife?

With a pang he recalled that he was the indirect cause of Mortimer's disgrace. It was his work that had laid bare the embezzlement which, otherwise, might have remained undiscovered to the end of time. Ah! if he could help that deserted wife and her children! But thirty shillings a week——!

Prebbles put his elbow on the desk and rested his head on his hand. There was no unworthy thought in his heart; no wish that Mortimer might come to some bad end and his widow reconsider her unwise decision of nine years before. No! Something worldly had been aroused in Prebbles, but of such worldliness as seeking to profit by another's misfortune, he was as innocent as a babe.

Yet, if he were rich, if he could help Mortimer's wife anonymously——

He broke off his meditation with a shiver. He could scarcely believe his eyes. The hand that had been absently fumbling the papers in the cash-box was now clutching a packet of bank-notes. Prebbles rubbed his hand across his brow in a bewildered way and then examined the packet of notes.

One hundred pounds, just as it had come from the bank! Mortimer had not taken all the money in the cash-box, then.

This packet of notes was among the papers and had been overlooked. Prebbles was gratified. The company was one hundred pounds richer by Mortimer's oversight. This would prove a drop of comfort for Mr. Jones.

Delighted with the discovery, Prebbles dropped the notes into the box and closed the lid.

As he was about to replace the box in the safe, the devil entered his heart. He shut his eyes, and his hands suddenly began shaking as with a palsy. An instant later, he crouched over the box and glared about him.

Only the dark, shivering shadows were to be seen clinging to the corners of the room, crawling about the desks and chairs. He was alone! For the first time in ten long years his opportunity had come.

With a hoarse laugh that sounded like a wail from the depths of a tomb he threw open the lid of the box, clutched the notes and transferred them to his pocket.

"I have Mortimer's confession," muttered Prebbles, hoarsely; "he admits rifling the cash-box. He does not know that he overlooked this money, the company will not know! Mortimer took the contents of the cash-box and Mortimer has disappeared."

With sudden animation, he replaced the box in the safe, and closed the door.

There was a jaunty swing in his thin limbs as he started for the office door, his face was brighter, his eyes gleamed—ten years seemed to have fallen from his life. Opening the office door, he passed out, closing and locking it behind him. He rubbed his hands as he walked to the stairs to go away—away—where?

He was going into another world, into a world where every eye that looked at him would hold suspicion; into a world where he would shrink from the grasp of an honest hand; into a world whose confidence he had betrayed; into a world where life itself would be death and where death might be prayed for as a relief from his conscience, and prayed for in vain.

He halted; then he took a step forward and halted again.

Suddenly he turned and hurried back to the office at a run.

He tore open the office door like a madman; rushed in like a whirlwind; turned on the light after several bungling attempts and groaned again and again as in his excitement, he could not get the safe open.

But at last it was done. The money was returned to the cash-box and Prebbles, faint and trembling in every limb, leant his back against the closed door of the safe. He was almost overcome; his face was ashen and his lips pallid.

He took a step forward, tottered, fell. He strove to rise, but fell again, this time upon his knees. And as he knelt there, beside his old office stool, he clasped his hands and raised them aloft, with a quivering sob.

Just then a loud bell clanged the hour of midnight, and Time, the relentless, had ushered in a new day.

JOHN MACDONALD.

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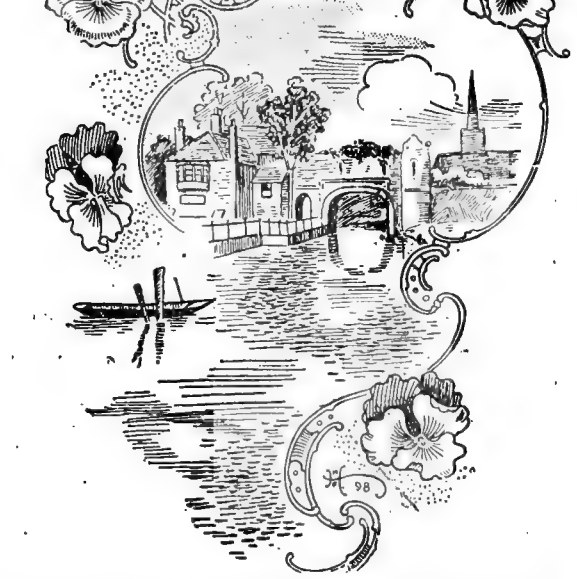
THE TWO CAPTAINS.



IMAGINE a diffident, silent, spare, but well-built and erect little white-haired, white-bearded man of, say, sixty—a man with those easily interested and trustful eyes you sometimes meet in a child's gaze (his were blue), imagine these qualities combined in a little elderly man, who had captained various vessels for nearly two score of years, and had never lost a ship; then you may form a picture, in your mind's eye, of Captain John Collings, of Liverpool.

Now imagine the captain's exact physical opposite. Then you may easily see Captain Lester—roughly, but firmly knit, lantern-jawed and cold-eyed. If Captain Lester had anything to say, he never hesitated to say it, and to say it in such words as allowed of no misunderstanding. He was as sure of himself as he was of the polar needle. Yet for years he had been sailing under Captain Collings as first mate, though he had previously sailed as captain and was entitled to the prefix.

The two were the closest of friends. I, as a boy, knew them both, for they were old friends of my father's while he was alive. He, too, was a seafaring man.

To me, as a boy, Captain Collings, small as he was, was an object of reverence and awe. Nobody could make such neat, fascinating, perfectly delightful things with tools; nobody had such wonderful deftness in the use of the jack-knife as Captain Collings had; and part and parcel of the sea though he was, he knew more about making and setting traps than anybody who spent his life ashore.

I liked the woods more than I did the sea. Many a time did the captain, while on shore, wander inland with me, and show me what he called his "idea of rigging a trap."

I shall never forget the dexterity, the neatness, and the sureness with which he made me the best "figure 4 trap" I have ever seen; and the delight of the day when he took me up to his own little private den where he slept, in his neat house, will remain with me as long as I live.

He was a widower, with one child, a girl about my own age, cared for and brought up, during his voyages at sea, by his unmarried sister, who kept house for him. But the charm of that room of his! On the neat shelves and quaint brackets of his own making arranged about the walls were models of boats of all conceivable rigs, complete to the smallest detail, and each so beautiful in its completeness that I looked and looked in speechless wonder.

Then he showed me, on the wall near the head of his bed, a miniature arrow; and while I was looking, it veered slightly, as it pointed midway between the S. and W. of the dial behind it.

"It's rigged on to the vane on the roof," he said. "It's a lot of foolishness," he added, with a chuckle, as I stood wrapt in admiration. Then my keen boy's eyes caught sight of a puzzling contrivance directly over a bracket lamp not far from the arrow.

"What's that for, Captain?" I asked.

"Well, George," he answered, "sometimes I read in bed, and that there's a rig I've fixed so's to put out the lamp without tumbling out of my berth. They tell me it's bad to read in bed, but I dunno. Here, I'll show you."

He lighted the paraffin lamp, reached behind the head of his small wooden bedstead, and pulled a string that was, unseen by me, hanging there. It was all done quickly and quietly. As he pulled the string a small, fan-shaped piece of leather attached to the end of a slender wooden arm descended exactly, and with just the right amount of force, upon the open top of the lamp chimney, then sprang back into its former position. The flame of the lamp went out.

"Captain, that's grand!" I exclaimed.

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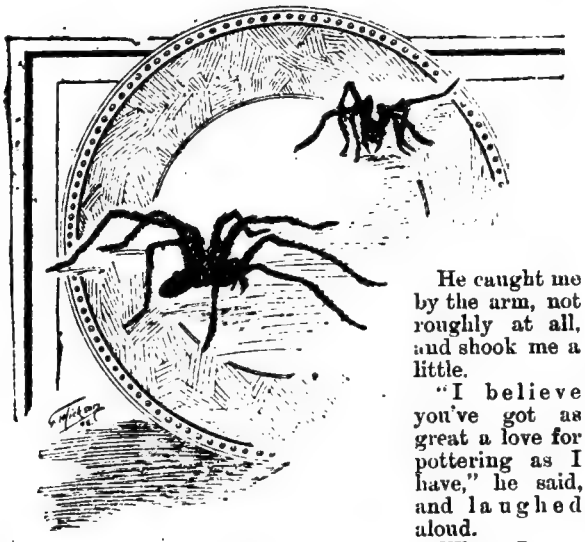

He caught me by the arm, not roughly at all, and shook me a little.

"I believe you've got as great a love for pottering as I have," he said, and laughed aloud.

When I was grown up I joined the police, and in course of time I found myself a member of the force of detective police, and at the time of which I write, had risen to be a sergeant.

One day when, to kill time, I was reading every word of a morning newspaper, I came across, in the shipping news, a line or so stating that the three-master, *Sarah*, of Liverpool, Captain Collings, had earned quite a sum as salvage for towing a big Australian cargoship disabled by bad weather into port.

At this moment our messenger entered my room.

"There are two men outside who want to see you, sir."

"Who are they?" I asked.

"They didn't give their names; said you'd know them, sir."

"What do they look like?"

"Well, sir," the messenger answered, with the beginning of a smile in the corners of his mouth, "they look like the long and short of it, just ashore from a voyage."

"Show them in," I said, and was quite prepared to see, as I did, my father's old friends a minute later.

"How d'you do?" said Captain Collings shyly.

"Well, my son, how are you?" said Captain Lester in his inflexible, resonant voice. He had always addressed me as "my son," as he invariably did any younger man whom he liked. If he didn't like him, he used no form of address whatever; but simply looked him in the eye and spoke. He rarely called anybody by name.

We shook hands. As often happens in the case of a big man, Captain Lester gave no responsive grip whatever. His hand in mine felt like a big leather glove that had dried hard after a thorough wetting and had been stuffed with sand. Captain Collings, on the contrary, gave me a quick, warm, firm pressure of the hand. The upshot of it all was that they took supper with me that evening at a cosy restaurant I used to frequent: and, over a bottle or two, told me all about themselves and their plans.

"So, my son," said Captain Lester finally, slowly sipping his drink; "you see how it is. It's a matter of a thousand apiece for Collings and me—and what's more, we've got the money, the notes, all safe and tight," and here he let his big, hard hand fall upon my knee, and gripped and shook it gently. "Ain't that so, Collings?"

"Ee-us," said the latter for a reply, quietly, with a slow, acquiescing nod of the head.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" I asked.

"That's just it. You listen," said Captain Lester.

I listened.

"He's"—with a jerk of his big thumb towards Captain Collings—"goin' to write out to Susan in Ireland, and if everything's fit, he's going over there for a time to stay 'long of her and her husband and the children."

I must mention here that, much to Captain Collings' delight, his daughter Susan had, some years before, married a young Irishman.

Arthur Carey his name was, and the good little captain had always cherished a certain amount of pride because Susan was married to a "financial" man; for Carey was cashier of a bank.

"Children?" I asked. "I thought there was only one."

Captain Collings held up two fingers, and smiled and nodded. Something about him—I can't tell you what—conveyed the idea, too, that the children would have money in the bank some day.

"Yes, sir," continued Captain Lester, "he's going over to see 'em,"—with another jerk of his thumb towards his friend, accomplished this time by merely turning over his big hand, which now lay, gnarled and brown, before him on the table—"but afore that he wants to have his fling." Here Captain Lester turned and slowly winked at Collings, who smiled as he passed the back of his hand across his shaven upper lip. "Yes, sir, wants to spend two or three weeks here, looking round and eating at hotels. That it?" Captain Collings nodded. "Then go to Belfast; then back to port and take the *Sarah* agin." Captain Lester leant back in his chair and gazed at me sternly, as if I were a questionable sky.

"Who's going to sail the *Sarah* in the meantime?" I asked.

"I am," replied Captain Lester. "Seen the owner this morning; signed, all settled. Month or thereabouts, perhaps. Then *he* takes her agin, same's before. All understood, fair and above board."

"I see," I said.

"Now, my son," said Captain Lester, leaning forward his elbows on the table, "I want you to look after *him*. He wants a snug place to bunk—not meals—he's to get *them* at hotels. He wants a place where the money he has with him won't be in no danger whatsoever."

"The money?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, my son, the money," Captain Lester repeated. "His'n mine. He's got both stowed away in his clothes."

Captain Lester leant back in his chair and stared at me hard, after having thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. He rocked slowly backwards and forwards on the hind legs of his chair.

"Why don't you deposit it in a bank?" I asked in amazement.

He shook his head. I argued. Captain Lester turned as smoothly from every argument I advanced as the rudder post of the *Sarah* turned in response to the pressure of his big hand upon the wheel; but he was, after all was said, as inflexible in his mental direction as the rudder post was in its mechanical limits.

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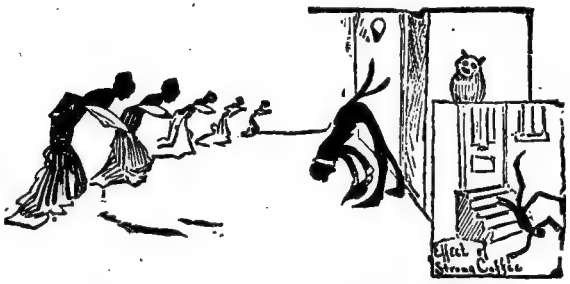

"No, my son," he said at last, "I don't know no bank as well as I do him."

"But what do you intend to do with this money when you come back?" I asked.

"Build a coaster, won't we?" he said, glancing at his friend.

"Of course," said Captain John Collings, with more assurance than I had ever seen in him.

"Call her *Susan*, too," said Lester.

"If you say so," said Collings bashfully.

"Well, I *do* say so," replied Lester, as if he were ready and anxious to do battle for his choice.

Meanwhile, I have been thinking. A friend of mine, Jack Fitzgerald, solicitor's clerk, had a room in one of the houses that used to be the mansions of the merchants years ago. Low studded and wainscotted (simply wainscotted with broad, smooth, painted panels), but sunny, and in a quiet, decent neighbourhood. It was a lovely old house and a loveable old room. Jack was away—was in the South of England for two months on business.

That night the captains slept aboard the *Sarah*, but the next day I received a telegram from Jack, in reply to my letter sent the night before.

Jack's answer was like himself—short, sharp, and satisfactory. All it said was:

"Of course. Jack."

In due time I "stowed away," to use his own expression, Captain Collings, together with his tin cash box, in Jack's room; and Captain Lester sailed away in command of the *Sarah*.

Then I let the little captain alone for a few days—to have his fling.

At length I called upon him to see how he was getting on, and how he stood "eating at hotels." I found him in, but—mercy! what a change! Instead of my clear-eyed, childlike, gentle friend, I found a pale, haggard, bent, and what was far worse, mumbling old man. I threw my arm about him, and begged him to tell me what was the trouble. For a moment he seemed like himself. He patted me on the shoulder, shook me by the hand, laughed—or tried to—and said he was "just as well as ever he was." But the next moment he became again the wreck I found him.

With the utmost gentleness, I tried to question him, but all to no purpose. He always came back to the same reply: "Just as well as ever I was, George; don't you worry." The pitiful attempt at a laugh that always followed my expressions of anxiety brought my heart into my mouth; and the look in his eyes, part terror, part despair, pierced it like a knife.

Instinctively I glanced about the room. It was the same as when Jack left it, except that here and there, in places where it could be done without disturbing Jack's belongings, the Captain had put things of his own—sea things, curiosities, queer relics of voyages. For instance, on the low, narrow mantelpiece that ran along above the old-fashioned, broad, open fireplace, I noticed, in spaces hitherto unused, a bronze Japanese figure, an East Indian idol in miniature, and so on, in various spots about the room, though not in many.

I noticed, too, his tin cash box under the head of his bed. It occurred to me that here might lie the trouble; but, no—he assured me, with the first semblance of real alertness he had shown, that it was safe and sound. Indeed, he now became, for him, positive and insistent, even more so than was necessary, that the cash box and its contents were all right. Finally, I gave it up, decided to come over the next day, and took my leave.

The next day I called. He was out. I called again and again. He was always out, and the door of his room was always locked. Then I questioned the landlady, whom I knew to be a reliable woman. But really, he was such a quiet little man, and gave so little trouble, she hadn't noticed; except that once he had asked her if there were a hardware shop near, and that when he came back, after having gone out for an hour or so, he was carrying a bundle.

At last I found him in once more. It was several days later, and again I was surprised at the change in his appearance. He was not *my* Captain Collings, to be sure; but he was nearer to it. He seemed more alive, less dejected, and, what I, by force of habit, I suppose, especially noted, less haunted by fear. But there was an eagerness, an alertness, a restlessness about him I did not like.

This time I took a new tack. I asked him what he had heard from his daughter. To this he replied, with even added eagerness, that she was "first rate." I asked him when he expected to go to her. He looked anywhere but at me—so unlike him—and went back to the mumbling. At length the mumbling resolved itself into coherence, and I distinguished words.

"Long journey; thought I'd wait till Lester reached port. Stay ashore a little longer, p'r'aps." All of which ended in a laugh, intended to convey the impression of nonchalance, and failing utterly to do so.

But now his manner changed with marked suddenness; he became almost keen.

"You're a detective?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied, for I knew he knew it.

"Well, you read that," he said, and thrust a letter at me. It was written with pen and ink, on ordinary stationery, such as you might buy at a general shop. I read these words:

"Captain.—We know you have the money—yours and his. Meet us in Portland Street at nine p.m. on the fifteenth, and give it up, or you will be a dead man next day."

There was no signature. At last I knew. My poor old friend was being slowly but surely frightened to death. I laughed aloud in my joy, for I knew that if any man could comfort and protect him, I could. I soothed and reassured him.

I asked for the envelope, but unfortunately he had destroyed it. We sat late into the night discussing a plan of my suggestion.

The fifteenth was two days off, and Captain Collings finally agreed, in response to my request, to walk the length of Portland Street at ten p.m. on that night. Of course, I meant to have my men carefully stationed.

Throughout our talk he was much more like himself, and, with a weight off my mind, I left him. I was sure of my ground now.

I called again the next day to again reassure him.

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He had received another letter, written like the first, and on the same kind of paper. It said only this:

"Remember. If you don't, you're a dead man on the sixteenth."

Again there was no signature, but this time he had preserved the envelope, so I knew where the letter had been posted. But the time was too short to do anything, so this information, was, to a degree, immaterial.

Once more I sat with Captain Collings and talked over the plan. Everything was arranged, and he agreed to every arrangement. He was like, yet strangely unlike, himself.

"I see by this morning's paper," he said abruptly, "that the *Sarah* is near home. Lester'll be here on the sixteenth."

I was glad of that, and told him so. When I left him, he was almost like himself in every way.

The night of the fifteenth was warm and clear, with a full moon shining. "Hard on our friends, the murderers," I thought to myself, as the Captain and I walked to his rendezvous. We carried out our programme to the letter. Captain Collings walked Portland Street from end to end, apparently alone, but always guarded, and not a soul did he meet.

Evidently our quarry had smelt a rat and had taken flight. As I walked back to the room with the Captain, we talked the matter over, and decided to await developments. He agreed that it would be best to stay in his room the next day, the sixteenth, and I assured him the house would be carefully guarded.

As I left him at the door, I laughed off the whole affair. When I bade him "good night," he held out his hand and said, in the same old quiet, bashful way I had always (until recently) known:

"Well, good-night, George. I know you'll take care o' me, you and Lester. Somehow I feel as if it might happen, though, to-morrow."

I again reassured him, and, after seeing him safely indoors, went home. He didn't know it, but two of my men were at that moment on the watch, and remained so all that night.

The next morning I was on the ground again. Nothing whatever had happened, my men told me. As I was walking with them I felt a weight on my shoulder. I turned and found the explanation.

The weight was Captain Lester's hand, and I heard his level voice saying, "Well, my son, how are you?" He had arrived at Tilbury early that morning, and had come direct to his old friend.

We entered the house together, and went to Captain Collings' door. I knocked. No answer.

"Ah! that hotel-eating makes him sleepy," said Captain Lester. "Give me a turn," and he knocked three times with his great, brine-hardened knuckles. It was enough to wake the dead, and, Heaven help us! that's what was needed.

Then we found that the door was not locked. We went in. The bright, warm sunlight was streaming into the room, and little Captain Collings was sitting peacefully in the armchair near the corner of the fireplace. I saw at a glance the small, round, dark blue spot in the centre of his forehead.

Captain Lester reached the chair first. Then I heard what I pray I may never hear again—the sounds of a great, big, simple heart in abject grief. He knelt by his friend, and fondled the hand resting on the arm of the chair. The other was hanging limp.

"Jack! Son! 'Tain't true! Say it ain't true!" and he bowed his head and sobbed aloud.

I waited. Then I touched him on the shoulder.

"Captain," I said, "this is murder!"

He was on his feet in an instant.

"Murder!" he whispered, looking at me. "Murder!" His voice was now like low, distant thunder. He turned, and for the first time saw the bullet hole in Captain Collings' forehead. "By Heaven! Who done it?"

These words came from him as if they were the last gasp from some overtaxed, exhausted, mighty engine. He looked a giant as he stood there, his arms at his side, but each bent inward, and his great fists clenched.

"Who done it, I say?" he repeated, but this time with a snarl like a tortured lion's.

"That we must find out," I said as gently as I could. "We must be calm, first of all, and see what we can find."

"Right, my son," he groaned. "I'm calm now," and he was; but his face! It was scarred by awful grief already.

"The cash box! See!" I exclaimed. We hurried to the bed together. Near it lay the box, open and empty, save for one single paper, a letter. I started to take it from the box, but Lester was quicker than I. In an instant he had it, and read the address. I had read it, too. It was addressed to him.

He turned to me, and said three words:

"You sit down."

I sat down. Standing where he was, he opened the letter and read. There was an inclosure. He read that, too. As he read, he breathed hard through his teeth, and sobbed.

While he was reading I had time to collect my thoughts, and started to my feet to call my men from the window Again came the three words, and—I sat down.

At last he raised his gaunt head from the papers. He walked to the armchair, and passed round it to the side next the fireplace looking at the floor. He stooped and pointed at what I had not, in my distress, noticed before.

Beneath the limp arm that hung down lay a piece of white twine on the floor, in many S's, L's, and O's, as if it had been jerked there. Then he stared at me, a long, agonised, hopeless stare. At last he spoke, and all he said was:

"You keep sitting down."

He looked closely at the old-fashioned carving that formed the outer edge of the mantelpiece itself. Next he looked at his dead friend, and sighed.

Then he went to the further side of the fireplace, and felt carefully along the moulding bordering a large panel that evidently to me, knowing as I did these old houses, covered some unused space beside the chimney breast.

His examination was short. He gave me a look as he finished, and his look plainly repeated his last four words. He went quickly to the cupboard near the bed, returning immediately carrying a few simple tools. I saw they were new. Quickly and neatly his bulky hands did his bidding; mouldings, boards, finally the panel itself came off, and all almost without a sound. He was between me and what he was doing. He spoke over his shoulder.

"Lock that door."

I did it.

"Look here."

I came to his side and looked in the opening.

"See?" he said.

His voice was deep and quiet. I saw it all at a glance.

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In the pattern of the carving were recurrent, deep circular depressions; one of these had been bored through, forming a hole which led into the space behind the panel piece. Pointing through this hole, with fatal accuracy, was a revolver, lashed in place with infinite neatness. For the rest, I saw nothing but a heavy iron weight, a few slender notched sticks, a trap, and a piece of string—all lying together on the floor at the bottom of the space behind the panel. This was all I saw, but I *knew*.

"Sit down," said Captain Lester.

As I did so he drew towards him a chair and sat down himself, exactly facing me.

"Now you listen."

He took from his pocket, where he had carefully placed them, the papers we found in the box.

"This is from *him*," he said, "to me. But I'll read it to *you*."

Then he read as follows:—

LESTER,

I ain't been murdered. I done it myself I've stole your money, and don't dare to face you. Before reading further please read the letter from Susan, inclosed.

Here he opened and read the inclosure:

DEAR FATHER,

We are in fearful trouble, and I write to you for help. Don't blame Arthur. He has always been a good husband to me, and I love him dearly. He has taken money from the bank to speculate with, and oh, father, I know it will kill you with grief! we've got to have £2,000 at once, or Arthur will have to go to prison. Think of me and the children, father dear, and help us if you can.

SUSAN.

Without comment, Captain Lester returned to the letter from his friend:

Now, Lester, you know why I done it. My last wish is that she should always think I have been murdered. If she should find out I had done just what her husband did, it would break her heart. She's all right now. I sent her your money and mine. If you can find it in your heart to do what I ask you will much oblige

JOHN COLLINGS.

When Captain Lester had finished reading, he carefully refolded the papers and put them back in his pocket. Then he turned to me.

"You stand up," he said, as he arose himself. I stood. He placed a hand on each of my shoulders. I felt his grip *then*. I can feel it still.

"My son," he said, looking down into my eyes, "there's just two men who knows about this. Just as soon as any more knows it, one o' them two has got to die, if I have to kill him. What do you say?"

For answer I held out my hand. Wouldn't you have? He threw his arms about me, and we cried like children.

Then we quietly destroyed all evidence of suicide, and replaced the panel and moulding. This finished, I glanced hurriedly through the writing desk. I didn't find much, merely a piece of blotting paper, upon which some letters, reversed, were visible. I could easily read. In a drawer, I found, also, a few sheets of paper like that used in the threatening letters. Then I went out and gave my men instructions in regard to Captain John Collings' murder.

* * * * *

Captain Lester went down with the *Sarah*, in the great gale of '93. Both Susan and her husband are dead. Otherwise I should not have told this tale.

M. HIGGINS.

LANDLADY: "Well, I must do something to keep the wolf from the door."

Boarder: "I don't know that it is altogether necessary. Let him come in and partake of one of your breakfasts, and I don't think he'll trouble you again."

AL WRIGHT: "My wife and I used to quarrel nearly all the time, but now we have the most peaceful home you ever saw."

Henry Peck: "Indeed! How did you manage it?"

Al Wright: "I simply make my wife so cross she refused to speak to me."

RESULT OF DISTRIBUTION No. 7.

FOUR of the people whose names were selected to receive a sovereign each on application have applied for their money. They are:

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, Croft Cottage, Ross-on-Wye.

CORPORAL THOS. GOLDING, H Company, 2nd Devon Regt., Aldershot.

F. ASHLEE, 47 Gillett Road, Thornton Heath.

H. B. APPLEYARD, 72 Winkingham Road, Grimsby.

Below are the names of those who failed to apply for the money awaiting them:

R. S. Muir, 43 Arlingford Road, Brixton, S.W.; Thos. Wood, 27 Moss Lane, Swinton, Manchester; W. Chas. Griffiths, 85 Elliott Street, Tyldesley; J. Murphy, 36, Clorliffe Road, Dublin; G. H. Perceval, 17 Warminster Road, South Norwood; P. Geraght, 13 Hauteville, Guernsey; W. E. James, "Rosedale," Leighton-on-Sea, Essex; J. R. Smyth, 19 Garlic Hill, E.C.; G. Cooper, 75 Maryville Street, Donegall Pass, Belfast; F. M. Whittingham, 5 Alvington Terrace, Cattedown Road, Plymouth; J. B. Pinker, Effingham House, Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.; Miss V. E. Carter, The High School, Lichfield; Miss H. Stille, 25 Snowdon Road, Eccles, Manchester; P. G. How, 38 West Street, Leytonstone; J. H. Kendle, 55 High Street, Bognor; Jos. Bell, 83 Albert Edward Road, Liverpool; S. B. Perrett, Market, Bristol; Staff-Sergt. Alfred Jenkins, Army Pay Corps, The Barracks, Cardiff; W. Wilson, 72 Millgate, Selby; C. Leitherbarrows, Warkworth, Northants; A. Fuller, High Street, Ramsey, Hunts; John Kirk, 28 Burton Road, Brixton, S.W.; Mrs. Mure, 35 Underwood Road, Paisley; R. Maclean Scott, 124 W. Graham Street, Glasgow; J. Ure, 18 Kellie Place, Alloa, N.B.; Mrs. Adey, 14 Sotheby Road, Highbury, N.; David Davies, J.P., 22 Canon Street, Aberdare; J. J. Taylor, Angel Hotel, Godalming; W. Rowlands, 1 Rock Villas, Mountain Ash; W. Evans, Church Road, Caerphilly; H. Mells, Oakleigh, West Liss, Hants; Mrs. Palmer, New Road, Solihull, Birmingham; P. P. Down, St. Vincent, Torrs Park, Ilfracombe; G. Webb, Castle Hall, Winchester; Mrs. Nichols, Trevellick, Cornwall; W. Footitt, 2 Claremont Villas, Gloucester Road, Ross; Mrs. Beech, Stafford Road, Oakengates; Levi Massey, Church Street, Church Gresley; E. Brown, 36 Potter Street, Worksop; J. B. Johnson, 30 Hollybank Road, Birkenhead; W. Abbot, Church Street, Lutterworth, Leicestershire; J. A. Bagshaw, High Street, Uppingham, Rutland; John Foster, 47 Cardigan Street, Oxford; Mrs. Dell, Bell Street, Princes Risborough; John Sears, 11 Park Street, Windsor; H. White, Linden House, Dunstable.

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THE FINAL WAR

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Shadow Hand," "An American Emperor," "The Lost Provinces," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Blow at Southern France.

A few weeks only had elapsed since the enemies of England had burst upon her in all their fury of fierce and sudden attack, and yet never was her command of the sea, her overwhelming supremacy above and beyond all other nations, more unquestionable or complete.

Her armies, it is true, were still in three foreign countries, struggling inch by inch against amazing odds, and by sheer courage and audacity forcing themselves towards the capitals of three great kingdoms. But upon the ocean highway there was but one flag, the Union Jack. The British Navy had asserted itself once more, and vindicated the boast which jealous rivals deem so arrogant. It swept the seas with unchallenged dominion.

"It was at the Nile and not at Waterloo that Europe found salvation," Admiral Mahan had once declared. "England may smite her enemies with her armies; she crushes them with her fleet."

The gallant sailor may have given a flourish of enthusiasm to his opinion from his deep love of blue water, and of those who navigate it. But there was profound truth in his remark. When the British navy threw an impenetrable wall, as it were, around the dominions of the three allied kingdoms, chased and caught their ships, closed their ports, barred their supplies, threatened their towns, and menaced their coasts, their fortunes were already tottering. And this had been done swiftly, completely, and with marvellous ease.

During the first stage of the war the Mediterranean was reduced to the condition of a lake. The French and German vessels could get neither out nor in. They were imprisoned in an inactivity which was the more ludicrous because there was no British possession to spoil. A few shells had been hurled upon Malta, which smiled cheerfully at the foe, secure in her impregnability. It was more waste of time and shot to pound away at this inaccessible sea-girt rock.

A sanguine French captain suggested Cyprus.

The Admiral glared at him:

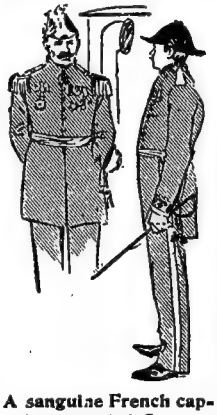
"And what will you capture there? Only a few figs and a bundle of the Sultan's unpaid bills!"

"But," stammered the luckless officer, "it will be something wrested from the British Empire."

"Yes," retorted the Admiral angrily, "you might as well think of robbing a man of his wart."

So Cyprus was left unscathed; partly, it must be confessed, because the German Admiral avowed he had not made his will, and whilst quite ready to take the risks of a mere naval engagement, he did not think he was called upon to encounter the climatic danger of a landing upon Cyprus at that time of year.

The position was indeed a helpless one. For a whole month these great vessels had steamed about in a weak and aimless fashion, which evoked the bitter irony of the Petit Journal. That popular little paper demanded that the Government should order the German and French fleets to act as excursion steamers between Marseilles and Naples, at popular rates, as some contribution toward the expenses of the war. And the Hamburg Zeitung was roused from its ponderous solemnity to defy a prosecution for *lèse-majesté*, and print the following stanza after Goethe:



A sanguine French captain suggested Cyprus.

Know'st thou the seas where our battleships fare?
Where the water is blue, and the heavens are bright;
Where there's nothing to battle, and no one to fight—
They are there, my child, they are *there!*

But the English fleet had no intention of giving the excellent commanders of the hostile battleships a holiday.

As reinforcements came after the victory in the Atlantic, and from Havre, several swift and decisive movements were made from Gibraltar which followed in one division after another being caught, and captured or sunk. It was not a difficult task, for by this time the combined fleets were far outnumbered, and fell an easy prey.

It thus happened that in a short space of time the Mediterranean was once more ridden by the invincible navy of England. And it followed from this that the Indian mails were scarcely interfered with, and went to and fro with the usual regularity and dispatch. The only difference was

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that they were carried from Suez to Port Said by train, the ocean stages being performed by gunboats.

But this serenity was not confined to the Mediterranean. The destruction of the Russian fleet swept the last enemy's ship from the open. The navies of France and Germany were sunk or shattered. Never before was the sea so safe, commerce less suspended, or order so prevalent.

Whilst the three most powerful countries of the Continent were in the throes of a grim death struggle, the frail brigantine of some small shipowner might sail boldly forth through foreign waters, bearing her burthen of grain or coal without a moment's perturbation. The trade of England continued brisk as ever. Her manufactures passed quickly to a thousand markets, rendered clamorous by the failure of French and German exporters, and prepared to pay high prices. For similar reasons there flowed into her ports an uninterrupted stream of corn and meat, and all the other necessaries of life, at rates which were incredibly small.

It was this that led to a remark of M. Zola's which brought him much ill-will—a fact he cared the less for because he had by this time been grudgingly elected a member of the French Academy.

"The greatness of England," he said in a pamphlet, "is that she can go quietly on with her business undisturbed, whilst her neighbours are quivering beneath the shock of cannon. She is a huge commercial house whose principal says on a Monday morning to one of his clerks: 'I want you to fight someone over the way. Go and pummel his head and then come back. But I can't have fisticuffs in *this* office and shall expect you on your stool to-morrow at ten.' And whilst his clerk puts on his coat and steps across to do what he is told, his master quietly turns over his ledger and looks the next order. The result is, his clerk *is* there next morning, with only one black eye. Depend upon it, when the cataclysm comes and the waters overwhelm the earth once more, England will be found floating on top, serene and unruffled, and gazing with undisguised greed on the rapid growth of her oceanic empire!"

M. Zola's windows were broken, but he only smiled. The pamphlet was in its tenth edition.

The remaining countries of Europe had been staggered at the distinctive character of the events that were taking place. Their position was an anxious one. But each, from policy or pusillanimity, soon found excellent reasons for becoming neutral.

Austria did not love Germany. It was a quarrel of brothers—a quarrel the more bitter because the one had done the other an irreparable injury. When the Emperor William asked co-operation from Vienna, or at least a friendly attitude, a dexterous answer was given. "Austria," wrote the Chancellor. "did not desire to impede the plans of Germany by premature action."

But her mind was fully made up. Either Germany and her allies would destroy England or it would in turn be destroyed. In either case Austria gained by waiting. If the allies fared ill she would have an immediate advantage in any share of the spoil that might follow. She had even tender hopes of regaining her lost provinces. But if Germany were victorious, and were inclined to show arrogance in settling up the question of the British possessions, Austria obviously had a far better chance of claiming her fair share if, with her powerful army, she might menace a weakened and palsied neighbour. For it was clear that the victors in the war would only be less crippled than the vanquished, and so Austria took care to offend neither combatant by overt act.

Italy, with chivalry of a brave if not over-vigorous friend, hastened to offer England the assistance of her diminished navy. But Great Britain delicately refused. She felt that Italy could not stand the burden of so costly an alliance. Already on the verge of bankruptcy, this new responsibility would prove her ruin. The kindliest messages were interchanged, and the Italian government were gratified by the high expressions of goodwill used in the despatches from Whitehall.

"Our navy is, we deem, sufficient for the task before it—enormous though it be," wrote Lord Salisbury, "we will, therefore, only avail ourselves of your generous proposal if necessity compels. In any case, you may rest assured that we feel the liveliest sense of gratitude, a feeling we trust that Providence will enable us to demonstrate practically if the infamous struggle which we are maintaining turns in our favour."

The policy of Spain was delightful. She had been asleep for two centuries, a sleep scarcely disturbed by the shock of the Cuban war. But she was nothing if not grandiose, and to her ministers it appeared that her attitude was one of profound anxiety and supreme importance to both belligerents.

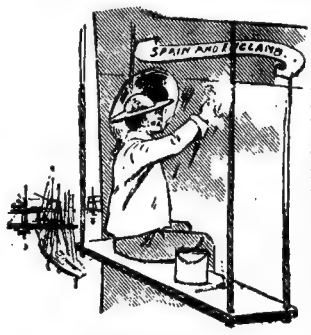
There were in her dockyards at the time six battleships. The history of these was painful in the extreme. It had taken twenty years to conceive them. When the order was reluctantly given, they rose slowly and with difficulty from theory into fact. Changes of ministry had delayed them. The death of naval constructors altered them. Sudden fits of economy had pruned them. Financial crisis had left them lingering half-way towards their birth, sighing in vain on their mouldering staithes for safe delivery to posthumous completion.

And when the consummation was reached it unhappily turned out that so many years had elapsed during the course of construction that they were lamentably out of date, and so patched and altered and old-fashioned that, as one British tar asserted valiantly, a plucky tug might almost have taken them in turn and "stove 'em in!"

It was these deadly engines of war that Spain, at the first opening of hostilities, had offered as a free gift to France. The rest of her fleet—which, it might be mentioned, was mainly built in Lord Armstrong's yards—she declared she would keep for purposes of defence. The offer was made with such high-flown eloquence that M. Hanotaux swore the phrases might have been copied from Don Quixote.

But the reverses of France and Germany followed quickly, and Spain trembled at the thought that she had perhaps been guilty of an indiscretion. Her ministers assembled in council and deliberated.

The result was that one fine morning the loungers around the Barcelona dockyards were surprised to find painters busy at the prow of the largest battleship. The name she bore was the *Spain and France*. With dexterous brush the latter part of this title was expunged and in a brief space of time the vessel nobly rode upon her bed of wood under the name of the *Spain and England*.



Painters busy at the prow of the largest battleship.

Accustomed to sudden changes of this sort, the Barcelona loungers only whistled a few bars from the *Barber of Seville*, and went their way.

Turkey shivered within her boundaries. Whatever the result of the war might be, it was clear that the Ottoman Empire was doomed. There could no longer be a "balance of power" to uphold. The victors would remain supreme, and one of their first acts would be to split up the historic kingdom and drive from Europe the last element of barbarism that disgraced her.

It was a pitiful position for any country to occupy. Turkey had thriven by the mutual jealousies of her neighbours. Her security lay in the permanence of their hatred

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of each other. But even to the Ottoman mind it was patent that there could be only a single issue to this gigantic conflict. No longer would equality exist amongst the great powers. One of these must attain an overwhelming ascendency, and that one, whether Russia, Germany, or England, would insist on carrying out Mr. Gladstone's bag and baggage policy.

"What idiots we are to quarrel with such people."

Turkey now formed the wisest conclusion she had come to for generations. She decided that if the end had to come, it was better for her that her fate should be determined by Great Britain. She was assured she would obtain more justice and consideration from her one avowed enemy than from any of her pretended friends. And she thus decided on an act of policy which proved of the greatest value to England. She closed the Bosphorus to the fleets of Russia and blocked up the Black Sea.

This unexpected danger was not the only one that Russia had to encounter. There lay at her gates three small, new-created, struggling, but brave States who had suffered much from her overbearing interference, and yet, with splendid heroism, had kept at bay the encroaching power of the insolent Slav. These were Servia, Bulgaria, and Roumania.

No sooner had Russia thrown in her power with the enemies of England, and distracted by the perils that beset her on either hand, lay an easier prey to her tiny neighbours, than the three States formed a hasty alliance, and resolved once and for all to throw off the galling yoke they had borne so long. It was a gallant and a dangerous enterprise, for Russia was as yet untouched, and it was not clear that she might not emerge from the contest victorious. But, knit to England by many ties of gratitude, and spurred by national spirit and patriotic ardour, they defied the event, mobilised their forces, and inaugurated a troublesome and untiring guerilla warfare against the southern provinces of Russia. Their action was destined to bear splendid fruit. It formed part of the chain of destiny that was to throttle the strength of Slavonic despotism.

Such was the condition of the countries of Europe when Sir Redvers Buller, in the middle of June, landed near Marseilles his Mediterranean Army Corps. It consisted of 200,000 men, of whom 120,000 were colonists. This new bolt was launched at France when she was already staggering from the effects of her terrible disasters on the banks of the Seine.

Sir Redvers Buller practically repeated the tactics adopted by Lord Roberts in effecting the capture of Havre. Six hours after the landing was effected a large number of the British contingent was encamped on La Cannebière, the famous boulevard of which the Provençals say:

"Si Paris avait La Cannebière, Paris serait un petite Marseille!"

Even the Colonial and Australian troops, fresh as they were to the actualities of warfare, were impressed by the half-heartedness of the resistance offered by their opponents. What was even more noticeable was the attitude of the people.

No man in France is more thoroughly patriotic than the Southerner, if his national pride be aroused and his sense of duty stirred.

But in the large towns of France, Paris excepted, there was a growing feeling of dismay at the progress of the war, and this was engrafted upon the earlier expression of public amazement when the wholly unexpected campaign burst upon them. Marseilles was a busy port, and had consequently suffered much as the direct outcome of the irrational undertaking of the Parisian politicians.

Hence the army of occupation found a remarkable readiness on the part of the shopkeepers to once more handle the British sovereign, that *passe-partout* which speaks all tongues with equal facility.

The Colonial troops astounded the Marseillais with their seeming prodigality, for the contrast between their habits and those of the penurious French soldier was striking indeed.

"What idiots we are to quarrel with such people," remarked a hotel proprietor to his confidant, the notary. "It is miraculous, but a common soldier, look you, orders a dinner that one of our generals would be glad to eat; and he pays for it, too!"

General Buller himself did not fail to note the passivity of the non-combatants. He commented strongly on the fact in his dispatches, and drew from it the conclusion that when negotiations for peace became practicable, there would be a large body of public opinion in favour of a rapid settlement.

This was the first rift in the dark cloud of murderous menace that threatened England. It was made much of in the Press at home, and its significance did not escape the authorities in Paris.

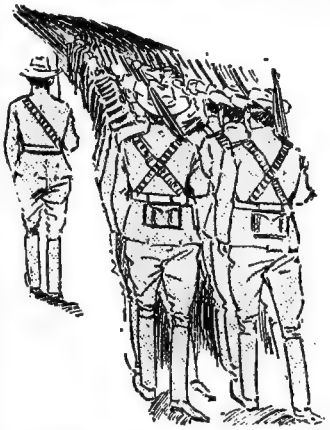
Hence there came imperative orders to the general commanding at Lyons to force an immediate engagement, whilst the Chalons Army Corps was hurried southwards to complete the discomfiture of the invaders.

Lord Wolseley's judgment was thus fully borne out by the progress of events.

In the neighbourhood of Miramas took place the first pitched battle between Buller's force and the Lyons troops. In his haste to obey orders the French commander blundered on to the British position at the close of a long day's march. The fight commenced almost in the dark, and the English general felt intuitively that accident and not design was the genesis of the attack.

He resolved, therefore, not to delay matters. Leaving the centre to continue a desultory struggle, he hurled two well constituted columns at the French left and right simultaneously, with instructions to follow parallel roads until they converged at a point some seven miles from Arles.

These human wedges split up the French into fragments. The Canadians especially proved to be experts in night marching, and the enemy speedily became convinced that owing to the incapacity of their leaders they were offered up as a holocaust.



The Canadians especially proved to be experts in night marching.

Even the brave troops of France grew tired of being butchered to make a political holiday. They melted into the gloom as effectually as possible, and when morning dawned the mournful tokens of war alone showed that resistance had been offered to the British advance. The Lyons army corps was non-existent, and the General sent his wife a message that she had better take the youngsters to the Swiss lakes

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CHAPTER XL.

Russia's Rude Awakening.

Captain Applin amused himself at the submarine telegraph office in Uzun Ada for some days before the Grand Duke Paul, generalissimo of the Czar's Caucasian army, became aware that things had gone wrong, somehow.

"Has this demand been complied with?"

Many strange messages had been sent to Baku across the Caspian.

For instance, an imperative request came, purporting to be from the Chief Transport Officer on the Asian side, that a steam launch should be forthwith loaded with cigars and wine, and, if possible, some Scotch whiskey, and dispatched at once.

This order was actually carried out before his highness the Grand Duke received a telegram from Moscow which blanched his swarthy cheeks and caused him to use forms of the Russian language which are not to be found in grammars or "Conversation Manuals for Travellers."

He furiously summoned the chief members of his staff, and when they had assembled he read to them the message which had so perturbed him.

It ran:

"Officer commanding at Orenburg reports that the whole of the Transcaspian Railway between Uzun Ada and the Oxus, with accumulated stores for use of Alikhanoff and for your expedition, has been seized by English force. Intelligence so astounding that it was wholly disbelieved, until the same officer, confirmed by Colonel and Major of the 7th Siberian Regiment, stationed at Orenburg, emphatically reiterated it. How is it that this terrible catastrophe seems to be unknown to you? And what has become of Alikhanoff?"

The telegram was dated June 24th, and was signed by the Chief of the Imperial Staff in the name of the Tsar Nicholas II.

"Surely, sir," cried a grizzled veteran of the Russo-Turkish campaign, "there is some ghastly hoax about this business?"

"Ghastly indeed," growled the Grand Duke, "but I fear it is we who have been hoaxed. Bring me the file of recent cablegrams from Uzun Ada," he roared to an aide-de-camp, who soon reappeared with the carefully preserved sheets of tissue.

The uppermost one had reference to the Scotch whiskey.

"A strange request," was the Duke Paul's comment.

The next peremptorily forbade the proposed dispatch from Baku of two Crimean regiments. "The hungry crew would eat us up in a few hours," was Applin's facetious comment, made in the name of the Russian Commandant General Konsky.

"Curious language for Konsky to address to you, sir,' observed a staff officer.

"I thought so at the time," murmured the Grand Duke, as though speaking to himself. "Now I understand it more fully."

The third message suggested that it would be convenient if a vessel were loaded up with four million rounds of cartridges for the Berdan rifle, together with any guns and cases of shells that might be awaiting transport. "We shall find them extremely useful at an early date," explained Applin, vice Gronovitch, head of the Ordnance Department for Transcaspia.

"Has this demand been complied with?" said the Russian chief, turning with icy calmness to the officer whose duty it was to attend to such matters.

"I regret to say, your Highness, that the vessel left yesterday. We forwarded six batteries with 800 rounds per gun. I am sorry. I could not know——"

"Enough. I alone am to blame. Fool that I am not to have realised there was something wrong. When did the last steamer leave Uzun Ada that arrived here?"

The man addressed consulted some memoranda before he answered:

"On June 12th."

"Then, gentlemen, it is very clear that shortly after that date the English by some means occupied Transcaspia, and it follows as an inevitable corollary that Alikhanoff has been defeated, nay, annihilated, else news of the disaster must have reached us from Penjdeh or Khushk."

If Applin had heard this conversation he would have cabled the remark that Russia must now see the grave error she committed in being habitually twelve days behind the time.

But he had other diversions at that particular moment.

The departure of the steamship and the launch having been duly reported to him, he prepared for their arrival three days later. This was a simple matter. When a vessel arrived at Uzun Ada from any destination, she was at once boarded by a number of officials, apparently Russians by their uniform, but really consisting of Applin himself and Shah Nawas Khan, with a squad of Turkomans, who vastly enjoyed the masquerading.

The Captain and crew were promptly seized and the vessel safely tied up in the harbour, with a strong guard on board.

The total cessation of cablegrams from Baku now however, warned Colonel Peyton of the near approach of a crisis.

He had to depend entirely upon his native levies, strengthened by a couple of squadrons of dragoons from Colonel Doyne's brigade. Guns in plenty were available, and, by dint of constant effort, he had managed to make some of the Turkomans efficient gunners. They were desperately afraid of the weapons, but the presence of a British trooper with each gun detachment made things work more easily.

Several batteries were mounted on the sand spits commanding the entrance channel, the only point from which danger was dreaded.

Peyton need not have feared attack from the sea. Nearly every available vessel afloat on the Caspian in the Russian service was now safely in his hands, save one—a large transport at Baku.

This the Grand Duke filled with Cossacks, and their destination was Michaelovsk, a port on the east coast of the Caspian, but higher up than Uzun Ada.

They landed quietly enough, and advanced with the utmost rapidity towards Uzun Ada. Were it not for the excessive caution displayed by their commander they might have surprised the unconscious occupants of the latter place.

Had they done so and overcome Peyton and his few British officers and men, the nomads would have fled in terror back to their hills.

As it was, their scouts were discovered in time, and after a sharp affair they were beaten off, to return to Michaelovsk and go on board the steamer again.

They reported Uzun Ada to be crammed with English troops, and the Grand Duke Paul became nearly crazy with impotent rage. To add fuel to the fire, his sense of utter helplessness was increased by his complete inability to comprehend either the means whereby his opponents had so confounded his projects or the scope of their future intentions

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In St. Petersburg consternation in Imperial circles was equally great.

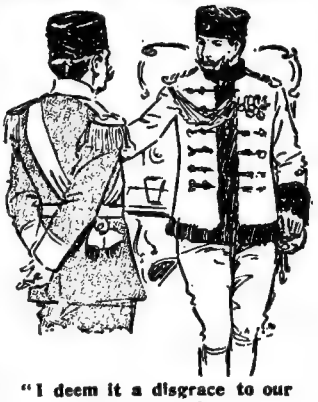
A rigorous press censorship kept definite information from reaching the public, but bad news percolates through unseen chinks, and it would have been far better for the Tsar if he had taken his people into his confidence and made the quarrel a national one.

As it was, the army, not less than the navy, felt itself to be ill led, and liable to be sacrificed piecemeal to the diplomatic requirements of the government, and from this source disaffection spread electrically through the provinces.

The Nihilist organisation fanned the smouldering embers of discontent, and the energy thus displayed paralysed the efforts of the secret police to cope with it.

The Tsar's throne, in no extravagant imagery, was built on the cone of a volcano.

Shortly after his unpleasant experience of Parisian fickleness, General Gourko was recalled to St. Petersburg. Russia was better served by her foreign correspondents than either France or Germany, and, in addition to the wholly unexpected development of affairs in Central Asia, she had reason to suspect that British activity would not end there. At this period of the year she was vulnerable in the White and Black Seas. In the Far East, too, at Vladivostock and Port Arthur, she was exposed to loss and humiliation, and the return of Admiral Fremantle to those waters, after landing the Australian levies at Karachi, did not augur well for the happiness and prosperity of Russian enterprises thereabouts.



"I deem it a disgrace to our arms, sir!"

Altogether, things had not gone as they promised at the outset of the war, and the Tsar had sent for his most trusted emissary to confer with him upon the situation.

Notwithstanding the trying heat of the summer months, Nicholas II. stuck to his political capital, but he had left the pretentious palace for a bijou residence on the banks of the Neva.

Here, on the evening of June 26th, he received Gourko, with whom he had already discussed the position on the Caspian.

The Tsar was sterner even than his wont, and his cold, merciless eyes glittered with a dangerous light. Face to face with sudden and unexpected disaster, the iron nerve and inexorable will of the man gave him an aspect that seemed tragically heroic.

"Someone has blundered," he said to Gourko. "The enemy has provided us with a phrase. I seem to have intrusted my army to the direction of madmen."

"As an old soldier, your Majesty," replied the General calmly. "I know something of the vicissitudes of war. It is fatal to form a hasty judgment. Let me be frank. I fear that I—the War Office, all of us—have deceived ourselves. It is clear to me that the British have devined our intentions. They were prepared beforehand; their plans were long formed; and our attack on the Bristol Channel alone was needed to set them in motion. They have acted with extraordinary dispatch, and I imagine they have been aided by miraculous good luck. It is the fortune of war, and blame is surely mere waste of time. Our error was in deeming our enemies less wary and less ready."

"I deem it a disgrace to our arms, sir," exclaimed the Tsar impetuously. "We have lost half a century in a single week. What do you make of Alikhanoff?"

"Of him I say nothing, sire," was Gourko's reply. "His forces are exterminated, himself dead or a fugitive. That is how I read it. The British must have met him in Afghanistan and disastrously defeated him. Else the Central Asia Railway could not be in their hands. Nor is its capture explicable even on that understanding, unless there has also been a countermove, the nature of which I do not profess to understand. This, at least, is certain, that the British must have stirred the border tribes, who are ever unsettled and unsteady, to assist them. By their aid, some small detachment must have penetrated to the Caspian, and the whole of that region is in their hands."

"And within sight of Russia!" ejaculated the Tsar.

"We must not be unduly alarmed," said Gourko. "The British army itself must be at least three weeks distant from the Caspian—even if they possess the railway. There is ample time for retaliation. But it is clear we must face the situation with promptness and energy."

"I shall leave the supreme direction in your hands, General," said the Tsar gravely. "I am prepared to listen to any proposal you may have to make."

"Sire," replied Gourko earnestly. "Let me speak plainly. Much may be lost if we are not frank at a crisis like this. No stone will be left unturned by the British. They are full of resource, their pride is roused, they are stimulated by success. They may attack us at several points, and we must rouse ourselves to a supreme effort. It will be dangerous to neglect any element that may be of service to us. Our strongest card now is to appeal to the democratic instinct. Let this be a national war. If Russia herself is in arms, resolute and united, I myself laugh at invasion. But the people must not deem it a soldier's war. They must be taken into our confidence and bidden to our cause."

The Tsar's brow darkened at these words, and his thin lips became pressed for a moment in cruel obstinacy.

"Let me not hear words such as these from you again," he said after a pause. "I will sacrifice much, but I cannot be so cowardly as to yield the pious cause of my race, and bend the sovereignty of the Romanoffs to the degradation of abject concession."

"No," he continued sternly, as he saw that Gourko was about to interrupt, "I have received my crown as a sacred trust from my forefathers. I have sworn to keep its dignity unsullied, and its right undiminished. I will perish rather than be a traitor to my kin. The destiny of the Romanoffs is determined by Heaven itself. We have all of us risked death with equanimity—some of us have fallen in the fulfilment of our duty. It is a religious charge that I hold in my hands, and Russia shall exist beneath the supremacy of our family, or it shall disappear from the face of the earth. Let us say no more. I am wrong even in thus discussing it with you. If you have a proposal of practical value, I am ready to hear."

Gourko had listened with a sinking heart, but he knew that no appeal of his could be of any avail. He merely bowed in acquiescence, and proceeded to unfold his plan of campaign.

Whilst the Tsar and he were in earnest discussion on the counter-movements to be made in Central Asia, M. de Witte, the Foreign Minister, was announced.

"I come with grave news," he said, after respectfully saluting his sovereign. "Intelligence has reached the Foreign Office that Servia, Bulgaria, and Roumania have formed a confederacy and declared active war against us. A more serious thing still is that the British fleet has passed through the Dardanelles."

"Bound w ither?" demanded the Tsar, startled visibly by this terrible news.

"That is a matter for surmise, sire," replied M. de Witte. "It is possible that the fleet is destined for Batoum."

"Batoum!" cried Gourko with animation. "Never! They will never land behind the barrier of the Caucasus."

"Then where else?" asked the Tsar with impatience.

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"They will deal a severer blow at us," said Gourko. "They will either land upon the Crimea, or, most possible of all, Odessa!"

General Gourko was a singularly well-informed man. Under other circumstances his intelligence and foresight would have been of the utmost value to his country.

The Mediterranean Fleet, commanded by Sir Michael Culme Seymour, having swept through the inland sea from Gibraltar, was at that moment approaching the Bosphorus without a whimper of discontent from Constantinople.

Indeed the forts on the Dardanelles had fired salutes in honour of the British flag. Fortunately the British Admiral expected something of the sort, so no misunderstanding occurred, which was as well for the forts.

Once out of sight of land in the Black Sea a halt was called for a final council on board the *Ramillies*, between the naval and military chiefs.

The result was quickly seen when the warships and the transports got under weigh again. Rear-Admiral Compton E. Domville, on the *Trafalgar*, led about one third of the fighting vessels, with two-thirds of the troops—some 80,000 men all told, Lord Methuen being in command—due north for Odessa, whilst the major portion of the armour-clads followed Sir Michael Seymour's flagship towards Sevastopol. The remainder of the troops, a fine army corps of 40,000 men, commanded by Sir Charles Warren, accompanied the Admiral, and excitement ran high on board when the cliffs of the Crimean Peninsular rose in view.

Soon it was possible to distinguish objects and places on shore. Men's hearts leapt tumultuously as they heard the familiar names of Alma, Inkerman, and Balaclava, and among the rank and file there was not the slightest doubt that the ground so hallowed with memories of the British army was again to witness the devotion and heroism of another generation.

But they were mistaken. After a splendid engagement between the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the Sevastopol forts, and the immensely stronger British force, Russia's Naval power in the near East ceased to exist. Even the fortifications received such a drubbing that the Governor of Sevastopol telegraphed for reinforcements to enable him to resist the expected landing.

England, however, had once too often made the mistake of expending her blood and treasure upon this isolated province of her huge enemy.

When the great naval force of Russia in the South had been reduced to impotence the fleet steamed off again, and this time made for Kertch.

A brief but effectual argument with the defenders of this port made it a simple matter for the ships to enter the Sea of Azov, and before the Britons, Australians, and Americans under Sir Charles Warren were quite sure of their geographical location they were actively engaged in capturing Taganrog and as much of the railway lines to Kharkov and Rostow as they could reasonably expect to hold as a preliminary.

The reason for this bold stroke became clear at St. Petersburg when news came simultaneously of the occupation of Odessa by Lord Methuen, who had been released from his divisional command in France to fill his present responsible position.

Odessa was not seized without some hard fighting.

It was strongly held by a Russian army corps, ever there in readiness to pounce upon the Turk. They had been warned to expect attack, and although no effective defence could be made against the fleet, it was a different matter when the British had landed and endeavoured to make even slight headway into the interior.

But troops like these, cheered by the knowledge of the deeds of their brethren in France and Germany, and inspired by the thought that they were fighting the first pitched battle against an hereditary enemy, are ill to stand against.

The famous Russian General, Kouropatkin, commanded the Odessa division, having been stationed there in order to lead the projected advance upon the Danube and the Bosphorus.

Had he withdrawn to Tiraspol he could have seriously hampered Lord Methuen's future operations. By furiously attacking the British at the earliest opportunity, he greatly helped them, for when he was routed with great loss, he opened up the whole province to them as far as Balta.

The transports, after performing their part of the programme, returned to Varna and Galatz, where they took on board vast numbers of the volunteers from the buffer state, who reinforced the British at Odessa and Taganrog, and also occupied Nikolaiev and Rostow.

By the third week in July, when the first detachment of the Indian Army had reached Uzun Ada, Lord Methuen and Sir Charles Warren were ready to strike into the interior on receipt of telegraphic instructions.

(To be continued.)

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LAST WRITTEN, FIRST READ.

P. R. T. writes to ask if we can tell him the origin of the expression "tip."———In an old English tavern a receptacle for small coin was placed in a conspicuous place, over which appeared in writing: "To insure promptness." Whatever was placed in the box was divided amongst the servants. Other taverns followed the example, and soon the words were abbreviated to T. I. P.; everybody knew what they indicated. Finally, the punctuation marks were dropped out, and the word "tip" became popular.

V. B.—So far as I know, no official record of any kind is kept of any meetings of the Cabinet.

N. C.—The reason given for the fact that the royal princes, when boys, are so commonly seen in Highland costume is, that it is the Queen's wish. Her Majesty's predilection for things Scottish is well known.

Geraldine asks: "Is it unhealthy to carry a muff?"———Unmistakably. Swinging the arms while walking is the best sort of exercise a girl can take, and this is an impossibility when clasped in a muff. Then, again, the muscles of the upper part of the body are spread out in all directions like a fan. If the shoulders are held together, the chest shrinks; the muff, in fact, develops a stoop and utterly ruins the symmetry of the whole figure.

W. Y.—No living representative of the animal kingdom has more than five toes, digits, or claws to each foot, hand, or limb, with the exception, of course, of monstrosities.

N. M.—The only venomous bird known is the Rpir N'Doch, or "Bird of Death," a native of New Guinea. It is the size of a pigeon, can only fly a few feet, and is easily caught. Its bite causes excruciating pains, loss of sight, and sometimes lockjaw. No person bitten by it has recovered, and death comes within a few hours.

D. W.—The coinage of new words in the English language continues at the rate of 100 annually.

B. C.—The wooden shoe industry still gives employment to a large number of people in France and in her lost province of Alsace. They are usually made by machinery, but in the Lozere district they are still made by hand. 1,700 persons are engaged in the industry in the last-named province, and their output is half a million yearly. The total number of wooden shoes made annually in the places mentioned is four millions.

S. P.—The restaurants of London provide about 1,000,000 lunches a day.

Jennie writes: "Is it true that the use of perfumes is dangerous?"———Yes, in a way, for by their use the secretory glands are weakened and overtaxed, and the hearing, the throat, and the lungs, and the sense of smell become affected.

D. W.—A carpet was not always a covering for the floor, but what we now term a table-cloth. A topic was always on the carpet when lying on the table for discussion, or when gossiped about by people sitting at a table. Hence the expression: "*Sur le tapis.*"

"Whilst reading the other day," writes H. G., "of the great precautions that are taken to guard the life of the Tsar from the designs of the Nihilists, it occurred to me that if a Nihilist ever got a chance at him with a razor, in the guise of a barber, he would not stand much chance."———There is not likelihood of such a catastrophe as that. In the first place, the Tsar never uses a razor, his beard being carefully trimmed with scissors. Even this is treated as a responsible and important function, and one of the Grand Masters of the Court always attends His Majesty when he is under the care of the barber, who himself is a tried and trusted individual.

D. T. has been terribly shocked by reading a report to the effect that settlers in the West are in the habit of burning corn as fuel. To him it seems "perfectly sinful that grain, which might feed thousands of hungry people, should be destroyed in that way."———In this case, however, the apparent waste is justifiable. In the first place, corn in the ear can be burnt in stoves made for either soft or hard coal, and is especially good fuel for cooking stoves. Moreover, in the district referred to it can be raised in one-tenth of the time and at less expense than timber can be raised for the same purpose. Two bushels of corn will make a fire which will keep a family warm all day, even in very cold weather. Some recommend raising sunflowers for firewood, but they are not as good as corn.

H. M.—The average duration of life in European countries is greatest in Norway and Sweden and lowest in Italy and Austria. Consumption carries off a large number of people in Vienna, owing, it appears, to the quantity of fine dust particles in the air.

T.—There are at least forty varieties of tobacco plant.

R. H. T. asks: "Is it possible for hydrophobia to result from the bite of a dog that is not mad?"———No, hydrophobia is not a spontaneous disease, and cannot be given to a person by a dog unless the animal was mad when it caused the wound.

R. D. M.—Roumania is the highest taxed country in the world. Every bottle of foreign whisky has to pay a shilling duty; there is a tax on your door-plate, a tax on female servants, and doctors have to pay yearly for the privilege of exercising their profession.

Curate would like to know what the Pope's stipend amounts to.———His Holiness is not in receipt of any fixed annual income; the principal source of his revenue is the Peter's Pence, a collection taken up each year in every Roman Catholic church. The total usually reaches on an average about £300,000. Of this the Pope usually retains £20,000, and the remainder is divided amongst the cardinals, poor bishoprics, the administration of the Church, diplomatic expenses, schools, the maintenance of the Vatican and its dependencies.

M. S. would like to know if there is any country in which civilians are compelled to go about armed?———There is such a country, and that is Montenegro. Not only is every man compelled to carry about arms, but he is not even allowed to select his own weapon. Whether he wishes it or not, he is obliged to purchase from the Government a huge revolver eighteen inches long and weighing several pounds, which must be carried in front of his belt in a red Morocco case provided for that purpose, and woe betide the man who appears in the streets who is not thus armed.

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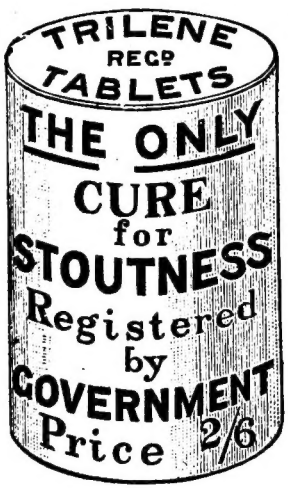

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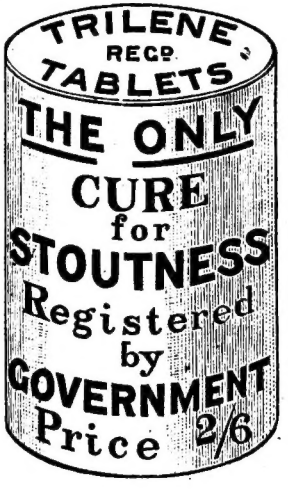

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"67 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

"Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

Jhansi, India, Sept. 14th, 1897.

SURGEON-COLONEL E. S. BRANDER, M.D., writes: "As far as my experience goes, your Tablets form an excellent preparation for reducing weight."

Mrs. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

Mrs. F. HARPER, 61 Portland Crescent, Leeds, writes: "My doctor persuaded me to try a box, and I find they have done my breathing a lot of good and I can get about much better. My doctor did not wish his name mentioned, but they have done him good personally."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

Miss CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 2lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity.

FATHER T. M. BYRNE, of Holy Cross Abbey, Sligo, writes: "When I began your Tablets I was 12st. 5lb.; I now scale at 10st. 11lb.—my case, too, is hereditary."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb.

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. WHITEHOUSE, of Poplar Avenue, Edgbaston, writes: "My husband is in splendid health, and has lost 15lb. in weight since taking the Tablets; I am sure I thank you on his account."

Mrs. JAMES SMITH, of Cowell Terrace, Soham, says: "Your 2s. 6d. box of Tablets reduced my weight 12lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MR. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mr. BUTLER, Surgeon, M.R.C.V.S., of Hampton Manor, Evesham, says: "My patient has lost 1st. in weight whilst taking your Tablets."

Miss B. MCKENZIE, of Greenhall, High Blantyre, N.B., says: "Completely cured, being reduced 2st."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess G. FURSTENBERG, of Stammheim, Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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GIGANTIC AUTUMN SALE, 1898.

ILLUSTRATED BARGAIN CATALOGUES OF CARPETS, HEARTHRUGS, TABLE LINEN, CURTAINS, etc., POST FREE, if mentioning *Short Stories* 10/12/98 when writing.

A Stock of 10,000 PATENT WADDED QUILTS, TORALIUMS, OR BED COVERS

(as Illustration).

Covered with Oriental Reversible Soft Sateen with double border. Size 54in. by 60in. These Quilts are offered below anything in the Wholesale Trade, and cause the greatest consternation to the buyer, wondering how they can be produced for the money.

SPECIAL OFFER.—Three Quilts for 10/-, or Six for 19/6, or Twelve for 38/-

Sale Price **3/6** Each. *Postage 6d. ex.*

At an Enormous Reduction to Clear Out.

The Dowager Lady GUISE writes: Leyden Dene, Bournemouth, Dec. 19th.—Please send three more of the wadded Quilts for 10/-, cheque enclosed.

The "Queen's Royal" Household Carpets and Hearthrugs are extolled by all the Nations of the Earth.

Gigantic Sale of the "QUEEN'S ROYAL" Household

Sale Price.

2/- HEARTHRUGS (Regd.)

In REVERSIBLE RICH TURKEY PATTERNS, measuring 6ft. long, and 3ft. wide. These HEARTHRUGS have gained a world-wide reputation for MAGNIFICENCE, CHEAPNESS, and UTILITY, having no equal. Registered New Designs, and considered Works of Art. Thousands of Repeat Orders and Testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. **SPECIAL OFFER.—Three for 5/9; Six for 11/3; Twelve for 22/-**

The "Queen's Royal" Household Carpets and Hearthrugs are patronised by Royalty, Nobility, and Clergy from all parts of the Empire.

Gigantic Sale of the "Queen's Royal" Household Reversible Rich Turkey Pattern

CARPETS (Regd.)

Trade Mark on all Goods. Beware of Imitations.

Admittedly the Cheapest in the World. *Woven without seam. Altogether superior quality, with handsome border to correspond. A marvel for excellence and beauty. Thousands of Repeat Orders and Testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.*

REDUCED SALE PRICE.

6ft. by 9ft.	7/6	10½ft. by 12ft.	18/0
8ft. by 9ft.	9/0	12ft. by 12ft.	21/0
6ft. by 12ft.	10/6	9ft. by 15ft.	19/6
9ft. by 9ft.	11/0	12ft. by 13½ft.	22/0
9ft. by 10½ft.	13/6	12ft. by 15ft.	25/6
9ft. by 12ft.	15/0	12ft. by 18ft.	30/0
9ft. by 13½ft.	16/6	12ft. by 21ft.	35/6

Octagon Villa, The Lizard, R.S.O., 15/8/93.—J. CARWARDINE, Esq., writes: "I am very pleased with the Carpet you sent me. I have saved 50 per cent. by giving you the order. I paid half as much again to a local tradesman for Carpets the same quality a year ago. I have never been so pleased of any former purchase."

Colossal Sale of Rich Velvet Pile Real *Sale Price*

BRUSSELS HEARTHRUGS 5/6

In Rich Oriental and Indian Art Designs, measuring 6ft. by 3ft., which for price, real value, width and richness of manufacture will be found unapproachable.

SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Rugs, 16/-; 6 for 31/-

"Melville Castle, Glasswade, Midlothian, June 1st. The Right Honourable The VISCOUNTESS MELVILLE writes: "I am very pleased with the 'Royal' Velvet Hearthrugs to hand, and would like four more Hearthrugs. Her ladyship would also like two Velvet Carpets at 30/-, one ditto 60/6 to match them. Cheque £3 14s. inclosed."

COLOSSAL SALE OF RICH VELVET PILE

REAL BRUSSELS CARPETS

Extraordinarily Heavy, very Best Quality, Newest and Choicest Designs. In Old Gold, Sultan, Terra Cotta, Crimson, Sky, Navy, and the latest colours. With handsome border to correspond. Guaranteed to wear for years and give every satisfaction. The sizes and prices as follows (all ready for putting down):

REDUCED SALE PRICE LIST.

4½ft. by 7ft.	11/-	VELVET PILE BRUSSELS CARPET SQUARES.	9ft. by 12ft.	38/-
6ft. by 9ft.	18/-		11ft. by 12ft.	47/-
7½ft. by 9ft.	23/-		12ft. by 13½ft.	59/-
9ft. by 9ft.	28/-		12ft. by 15ft.	69/-
9ft. by 10½ft.	33/-		12ft. by 18ft.	77/-

Altogether superior quality, with handsome border to correspond. A marvel of excellence and beauty. Thousands of repeat orders and testimonials received, giving the highest satisfaction. When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

Ramsden, Chardbury, 4/3/98.—Lady HICKS BEACH writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson and Son send her one of their 'Queen's Royal' Carpets, 9ft. by 9ft., 11/-? Cheque enclosed. The other parcel received safely, and I am pleased with it."

Also RICH VELVET PILE STAIR CARPETS, bordered to match,

18in. wide, 1/3 per yard; 22½in. wide, 2/- per yard; 27in. wide, 2/3 per yard.

OUR NEW VENTURE.—Yes. Two different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! *(Copyright.)*

H.R.H. Prince L. of Battenberg. Sir Henry de Bathe. H.I.H. Eugénie de Christoforo. Duchess of Wellington. Archbishop of York.
H.R.H. Prince K. Bigit Siam. Sir Henry Bellingham. Princess Palæologus Nicephorus Marchioness of Breadalbane. Princess de Croy.
Marquis of Breadalbane. Sir E. H. Blair, Bart. Commence. Marchioness of Hastings.

To Readers of "Short Stories," 10/12/98, on receipt of Postal Order or Stamps, value

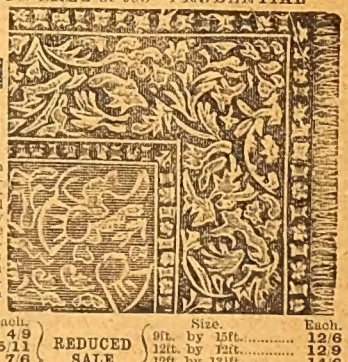
4/6

(Regd.) We will send you THE LARGEST GENUINE REVERSIBLE CARPET in BRUSSELS PATTERN WITH RUG ever sold at the price, direct from the Looms to any address on receipt of amount. Suitable for drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, etc., bordered and woven in Brussels patterns, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any middle profit. Remember these are woven, and are made of a material almost equal to wool. Thousands of these Carpets have been already sold at double these prices.

SPECIAL OFFER—2 CARPETS and 2 RUGS, 8s. [Cut this out.]

PRODIGIOUS SALE of the "PRUDENTIAL"

TURKEY PATTERN CARPETS (Regd).



Reversible, woven throughout, bordered, richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

REDUCED SALE PRICE.

Size.	Each.	Size.	Each.
6ft. by 9ft.	4/9	9ft. by 15ft.	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft.	5/11	12ft. by 12ft.	12/9
9ft. by 9ft.	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft.	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft.	8/6	12ft. by 15ft.	15/9
9ft. by 12ft.	9/6	12ft. by 18ft.	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft.	11/6	12ft. by 21ft.	22/6

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg.), to match above Carpets, sent for 1/6 extra, size 2yd. long and 1yd. wide. Special Offer, Three Hearthrugs for 4/3, or Six for 8/-, or Twelve for 15/6, sterling value.

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We rely upon Spontaneous Repeat Orders from our Clients for the maintenance of our Trade. Established nearly a Quarter of a Century. All orders despatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. N.B.—Foreign Orders executed and packed free, and shipped at lowest rates. Telegraphic Address: "ECLIPSE, LEEDS." Telephone, No. 948.

Cheques and P.O.'s payable to—

F. HODGSON & SON, Manufacturers, Importers, and Merchants, **WOODSLEY ROAD, LEEDS.**

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On receipt of this Coupon and P.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send any goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

SPECIAL 1898.

SPECIALLY REDUCED INTRODUCTION

SALE PARCEL WITH FREE GIFT.

enclosed, consisting of

1 Magnificently Rich Cream-Coloured Curly Sheepskin Hearthrug, average size 6 feet by 3 feet, perfection in quality.

1 Beautiful Reversible Art Crimson Plush Bed Rug, Sofa Cover, or Table Cover, double warp, very heavy, size 50 inches by 78 inches.

2 Beautiful Silver Goatskin Door Mats, lined woollen cloth throughout, pinked edges, best finish, ornamental to any room.

1 Elegant Hair Brush, highly finished, with mirror back.

THE LOT 10/6

Postage 9d. extra.

"Given" Away.

Providing *SHORT STORIES* Coupon, 10/12/98, as quoted, a FREE GIFT will be enclosed—a very handsome Electro Silver Plated "OWL" PEPPER STAND with coloured eyes and gilt feet. Cash returned if not satisfied. (Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

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